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Gary K. Wolfe and Ellen R. Weil

## Harlan Ellison: An Introduction

He had become a *personality*, something they had filtered out of the system many decades before. But there it was, and there he was, a very definitely imposing personality. In certain circles—middle-class circles—it was thought disgusting. Vulgar ostentation. Anarchistic. Shameful. In others, there was only sniggering: those strata where thought is subjugated to form and ritual, niceties, proprieties. But down below, ah, down below . . .

—“Repent, Harlequin!” Said the Ticktockman” (1965)

In December, 1965, *Galaxy* magazine was clearly one of the leading science fiction magazines in the world. Begun under the editorship of Horace Gold in 1950, the magazine had done much to shift the focus of American popular science fiction from outer-space adventures and technological problem-solving stories to satire and social commentary. One of the magazine's leading satirists, Fredrik Pohl, had relieved Gold as editor in 1961 and continued this emphasis. Among the stories that Pohl published in that December 1965 issue was one bearing the old title, “Repent, Harlequin!” Said the Ticktockman,” and it described a society so severely ruled by the clock that to be a few minutes late meant having those minutes deducted from one's lifespan. The ruler of this society, a timekeeper known as the Ticktockman, is plagued by a chronically late guerrilla warrior called Harlequin, who fights the system through such bizarre means as unleashing millions of jellybeans onto the society's mechanized walkways, creating a rush-hour delay that throws everyone off schedule. Even by *Galaxy's* unusually high standards for social satire, the story's energy and passion, not to mention the unrestrained surrealism of its imagery, placed it in a class by itself. In only a few pages, the author—Harlan Ellison—had constructed an anti-utopian scenario as evocative in its own way as those of such classics as George Orwell's *1984* or Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (which also first appeared as a story in *Galaxy*). Like those earlier writers, and like editor Pohl in his own fiction, Ellison realized that the value of such science fiction came not from how it extrapolated a believable future, but from how it transformed the anxieties of the present into memorable characters and images. “Repent, Harlequin!” quickly became a classic in the field, winning both the Hugo Awards (from science fiction fans) and the Nebula Award (from science fiction writers), and appearing in anthologies ranging from psychology texts to high school readers. It was a story which in many ways helped liberate science fiction from earlier stylistic and formulaic constraints, and it firmly established its author's reputation as one of the major innovators in the field.

It also, ironically, began to lock its author into a trap of identity eerily similar to that of the Harlequin in the world of the Ticktockman. Ellison was far from unknown in science fiction when “Repent, Harlequin!” appeared; he had, in fact, been publishing prolifically for nearly a decade, and he had been a colorful and active figure in fandom before that. His earlier stories were characteristically workmanlike,

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## In this issue

Gary Wolfe and Ellen Weil introduce the inimitable Harlan Ellison

John Clute successfully separates the Ace and Tor siamese twins

Richard Terra examines the mechanics of the world-state *Chung Kuo*

David Drake presents the Trilogy of Trilogies

Robert Devereaux delivers the goods on Datlow and Windling's third *Year's Best Fantasy and Horror*

Plus brain-twisting reviews, horizon-expanding reading lists, rhetorical splatterpunk and the small press McGuffin.

John Clute

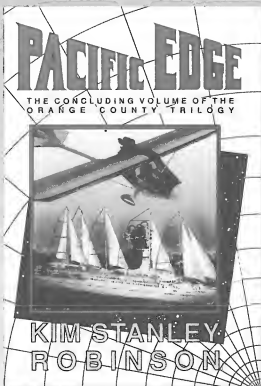
## A Few Double Notes

Over the centuries, we have learned how to take books. Accidents of vellum or Bok aside, they are nothing but what they seem, doors on top, pages beneath. Except for a certain subliminal urgency at the corner of the eye, the quality of production of a book does not make up part of the story. All this is more than sufficiently obvious. What should also be more than sufficiently obvious, then, is the fact that, in 1953, when the late Donald A. Wollheim began to publish his long series of *Ace Doubles*, something new was brought into the world—certainly into the world of sf. The *Ace Double* was a volume consisting of two stories bound dos-à-dos, so that if one turned the first story upside down, the second would stare directly up at one, awaiting the read, a second opening of the magic gate. The shape of the book itself, in other words, was radically foregrounded; there was no way to avoid some consciousness that the book itself was part of the message. Each *Ace Double* was an either/or, a statement that A called for B, an argument—an argument, of course, that remained more or less unspoken; and it will carry one very much further into Pseudo's Corner to attempt much more in the way of pop reflection along the lines of articulating it. But (leaving aside the fact that non-sf Doubles were also published, outliers of the part of the list closest to Wollheim's heart) perhaps one might say just this: That in 1953 each *Ace Double* seemed to make an implicit rhetorical statement about the genre that no sf text was an island—because you only had to turn the book over and dos-à-dos like magic another book of the same kind stared you in the face—but a network of gates.

Of course the past is a different country, and 1953 is several worlds gone; and most of the futures we longed to inhabit in that year have since been eaten. Again and again the sf scene just after World War Two has been described, so we can be brief about the backlog that had been building for years of novels first published in Golden Age magazines, about the beginning of the flood of titles round about 1946 when paper became readily available once again, about the start of the sf business, though for readers in the late '40s and early '50s the genre was still an affair of the heart, each book a gate for the elect to pass, a feast

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# KIM STANLEY ROBINSON



Kim Stanley Robinson writes with a love and understanding and evocation of the natural world comparable to that of John Muir or William Henry Hudson. In **PACIFIC EDGE** he is concerned with its preservation. One need not fully agree with the politics of any of his characters—as diverse as the people themselves—to enjoy their richly told story and have one's mind stirred up by the many ideas presented.

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undegradable. Each book from the magazine past was a talisman recovered, a confirmation of the strength of the gate forward; and each new title, like an eagle-flung wren, flew higher, into the unknown. Or so it seemed, at times, when one was young.

Even as late as 1953—for in this year the backlog had been plumbed but not yet exhausted, and large numbers of new writers were looking to publish books—the times continued to seem both ripe and new. The gates opened, like gullets of the wrens of dream, across the threshold. The affair of the “future” continued to seem to continue. Ballantine Books was founded, and seemed to launch yet another new age; but even more vivid than that list, with its Powers oversteering you more lay inside than you were likely to comprehend, were the first Ace Doubles, double-gates into the future, arguments that the future did exist and that we were part of the main. (Typical of the first releases were A. E. van Vogt's *World of Null-A* (a reprint which ran 182 pages) published dos-à-dos with his *Universe Maker* (1953, 138 pages), or the reprint of Robert E. Howard's *Conan the Conqueror* dos-à-dos with Leigh Brackett's *Sword of Rhiannon* (1953), an original. Books like these—along with half a dozen others published in the first half decade—gave off the smell and thrust and unholy naivete of a kind of hunger. This hunger—which in our minds was for the new—may have been artificial; but the trick worked. The thrill of turning an Ace Double upside down was the thrill of finding something new. Something untold. It may have been this reader's youth that made it seem to him that everything he read had just been written for the first time; but it is certainly the case that Ace Books so presented their Doubles, even the reprints. The future started here. We stepped on board.

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We turn to Tor, which began in 1988 to publish a series of Doubles clearly modeled on the Ace example. It is some turn. It is the turn of us taken. Forty years have passed. SF has become a tradition (as well as an integrated segment of an extremely large industry), and has grown a past upon its back, like a huge coral reef we secrete our daily doodles upon before dying. Into this new world—a world mostly made up of

things which *have been*—new Tor Doubles might be said to fit perfectly. In the glazed bubble English of their format they are almost perfect embodiments of the rictus of the anxiety of influence. They are rigid with belatedness. At first glance, most of the 27 Doubles published so far seem faithful to the old Ace dos-à-dos format, but on examination it is clear something very different is going on, that the rhetoric of the dos-à-dos format has undergone a radical change. If the original Ace Doubles seem to claim in the mind's eye that no of novel was an island, and that the gate to the future was shared, the Tor Doubles seem to claim that no of story is without a past, and that “the gate to the future” leads inexorably backwards to the Father, who holds in his hands the innumerable futures we never had. Often both sides of the Tor Double are reprints, stories which play on one another, and upon our heritage as genre readers. Perhaps more interestingly, others will present on one side a title which is somehow familiar—it may be the straight reprint of a well-known novella, or more slantwise to our memories it may be the original novella from which a full book was subsequently fixed up, under the same title as that ultimate full-length book—and on the other side a novella, or a small collection of stories, either brand-new or new to book form. But this new material will not necessarily stand alone; its relationship to the older title on the other side of the argument may be bound. The new story may take on the old one as an example to modify, chasten, cherish, avenge from, adulterate. But whether it is old stories paired, or new wrestling with old, at its heart the Tor Double series is two things never seen in its Ace ancestor. It is archival (for it restores the dead Fathers conversing). And it is sacerdotal (for it does not jump free).

Without going into any great detail, it should be possible to get some sense of all this stabbing at the dark. Tor 1 pairs Arthur C. Clarke's “A Meeting with Medusa” (1971) with Kim Stanley Robinson's “Green Mars” (1985); the determined openness of the second to the physical potentials of the solar system rewrites, in a darker era, Clarke's glowing anatomy of hope. Tor 2—“Hardfought” by Greg Bear and Timothy Zahn's “Cascade Point”—and Tor 3—Robert Silverberg's “Born With the Dead” and Brian Aldiss's “The Saliva Tree”—are made up of alternative “old master” plays on similar material from “long ago.”

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In Tor 4, John Varley's "Tango Charlie and Foxrot Romeo" (1986) does something to recast (but not advance upon) Samuel R. Delany's "The Star Po" (1966). Tor 5—Paul Anderson's "No Truce With Kings" and "The Ship of Shadows" by Fritz Leiber—and Tor 6—"Enemy Mine" by Barry Longyear and "Another Orphan" by John Kessel—and Tor 7—Vonda MacIntyre's "Screwtop" and James Tiptree, Jr.'s "The Girl Who Was Plugged In"—again present alternative players on the same keys. Tor 8—the longest of the series—rather movingly gives us two novels, *The Nemesis Game* (1961) by Leigh Brackett (itself once a new Ace Double) and *Battle for the Stars* (also 1961) by her husband Edmond Hamilton; the homage is just, elucidative, welcome, and nothing if not archival. Tor 9 gives us Isaac Asimov and Theodore Sturgeon sharing, long ago, a theme for us to feast back upon. Tor 10 cleverly pairs Gene Wolfe's "Seven American Nights" (1978) with Robert Silverberg's *Sailing to Byzantium* (1985), two tales which radically address the mappemonnds of the West, and which both

do so through a deep rewriting recourse to earlier models. Tor 8 and Tor 10 are small triumphs of commemoration. They give the series real life. They are tales told around the campfire in the dark after the future blew.

Later on in the series, the projects become much more specific. Tor 18—not put in dos-à-dos format, so that in fact it is an anthology—features C. L. Moore's "Vintage Season" (1946) and Robert Silverberg's "In Another Country" (1990) which is a direct sequel and homage to the earlier work. In Tor 22—also an anthology—Karen Haber's "Thieves' Carnival" (1990) prequels Leigh Brackett's "The Jewels of Bas" (1944). And so on. The pattern is clear, the hour late, anxiety high, the project worthwhile, the time past, the sort due. If someone is plumed sea, a wrestling arena, a safe house in the end. The argument of Tor Doubles is to wrap it. ▴

John Clute lives in London and reviews regularly for Interzone.

## Chung Kuo: The Middle Kingdom by David Wingrove

New York: Delacorte Press, 1990; \$19.95 hc; 592 pages

reviewed by Richard Terra

Is this ambition... or hubris?

*The Middle Kingdom* is the first book in David Wingrove's seven volume cycle of novels under the collective title of *Chung Kuo*. It is the opening volume of a sprawling, richly-detailed, intimately imagined work of epic scope. It is a stunning and admirable example of world building, and at times a truly exciting piece of narrative drama. And yet, even here, in the first volume, there are failures and lapses that threaten to undermine the integrity of the entire work. Has Wingrove overreached himself?

It would be useless to present a detailed synopsis of Wingrove's novel here; it is too large, too filled with detail and incident to be easily compressed. But his basic scenario is this:

Some time near the middle of the next century, amid a general collapse of the world social and economic order, the ruthless visionary fanatic Tsao Ch'un rises to power in China and initiates a war of global conquest leading to the death of over three billion human beings. Japan and the Middle East are laid waste; blacks as a race are exterminated. And as his sphere of control expands, Tsao Ch'un begins building the global city that is *Chung Kuo*'s vast shell of incredibly strong plastic molecular film—"ice"—spreading over the face of the earth like a mammoth glacier, three hundred levels over a kilometer tall.

The old world lies sealed off below, forgotten in the darkness beneath the new city, in The Clay: "Tsao Ch'un killed the old world. He buried it deep beneath the glacial city. But eventually his brutality and tyranny proved too much even for those who had helped him carry out his scheme. In 2087 his Council of Seven Ministers rose up against him, setting up a new government. They divided the world—Chung Kuo—among themselves, each calling himself 'Tang' (p. 503).

Wingrove's epic opens in the year 2190. The Seven Tang have ruled for over a century now, no less ruthlessly than Tsao Ch'un. Order, stability and social harmony are rigidly enforced, stifling change. Scientific and technological research are tightly controlled. Knowledge of the history of Western culture and science has been forbidden and suppressed; in its place the Seven have created an intricate false history in which China expanded to conquer Rome in the first century and went on to dominate the globe ever after.

But the world grows restless, chafing at the restrictions against change, resentful of the confinement of humanity within the crowded halls of the plastic city. The truth of human history is being rediscovered. Throughout the city, dissidents long for change, and conspire to challenge the rule of the Seven and those who support them. This, then, is Wingrove's theme: the conflict between the Western urge toward progress and innovation and the Eastern ideal of peace through balance, stability and order. Wingrove's presentation of the conflict is,

of course, more complex than this simple summary statement.

Clearly, Wingrove's primary models are the massive historical epics and dynamic histories of traditional Chinese literature, works that are still among the most popular and widely read in China to this day. (This is one reason why the Chinese are, on average, much more familiar with the personalities and minute details of their own history—they never seem to tire of retelling it again and again in dramatic form.) Comparisons to other equally large works of worldbuilding, such as Herbert's *Dune* series or Brunner's *Stand On Zanzibar*, could be made, but are largely irrelevant to the current discussion.

What Wingrove has done, above all else, is create an intricate scenario of the next two or three centuries of human history. This is in itself a fascinating accomplishment, but it falls far short of a complete, integrated work of art. The question is whether he is able to bring this scenario to life and give it meaning, and here we must judge not according to possible models or influences, but on the merits of the work itself.

Obviously, it is impossible to evaluate the entire *Chung Kuo* cycle at this point. But *The Middle Kingdom*, while it serves as the opening movement in an integrated, seven-volume work, is also intended to stand alone as a self-contained dramatic episode. In both roles the novel succeeds, but less well than it might have, for the book contains a number of flaws at many different levels that undermine its intellectual integrity, its dramatic power, and its thematic impact.

Disappointingly, it is at its most fundamental level that Wingrove's *The Middle Kingdom* exhibits the most detracting flaws. Although obviously the result of considerable effort, the underlying historical scenario that serves as the basis for the dramatic and thematic development of this imaginary world has many gaps, inconsistencies and lapses of plausibility.

The basic notion of a revitalized China conquering the world is quite plausible, as is much of Wingrove's speculation on how such a conquest would alter global society. His extrapolation of the rebirth of an Imperial China and its institutions, based on a revival of Confucian social forms and rituals, is powerful and imaginative, and quite believable, for those millennia-old traditions still lie beneath the thin modern veneer imposed by the Nationalist (Kuomintang) and Communist regimes earlier in this century.

What is difficult to accept, however, is his scenario in which China is able to conquer the world with nuclear weapons and horrendous genocide without any massive retaliation: it is hard (for me at least) to imagine just how the West (not to mention the Soviet Union, India, Pakistan and all the other smaller powers capable of fielding nuclear weapons) could *simultaneously* fall so low as to lose the capacity to wage nuclear war in the face of such a threat.<sup>3</sup> Even if we grant Wingrove this

<sup>1</sup>Literally, "the middle kingdom." This is how the Chinese have named their land since ancient times: between the mountains and the sea, between heaven and hell. A similar term in Old English served as the basis for Tolkien's "Middle Earth."

<sup>3</sup>One might consider the plight of the USSR as an example: despite serious economic and social disarray, its ability to sterilize the globe several times over remains largely undiminished.

point, many flaws remain.

One major glaring inconsistency in the novel's background is this: Imagine the incredible chaos that would follow the collapse of the West, Tsao Ch'un's global conquest and the forced relocation of the population inside the new City Earth. Add to this the concerted attempt to eradicate all memory of Western history and science and the constraints of the Edict forbidding uncontrolled technological research and development. Now, during the course of his narrative, Wingrove asks us to accept that, under these conditions, in only two hundred years, the human race is able to build his world-city and develop bio-chips allowing brain/machine communication; advanced implants; cloning of human beings; huge orbital farms supplying a major fraction of the world's foodstuffs (for 39 billion people) and a colony on Mars; high-capacity synthetic food production; the successful manipulation of the human genome to create artificial beings nearly indistinguishable from real humans; and, finally, the development of workable starflight technology.

This seems an ambitious slate of accomplishments to attribute to our future *without* any disruptions or social upheavals; that such advances could occur amid world-wide chaos and repression stretches the limits of plausibility.

Wingrove also seems to have not considered (or ignored) some of the consequences implied by his world-girdling plastic City Earth. His "ice" is an incredibly strong substance, and incredibly light. Everything is made from it: the City, furniture, clothing... yet the city structure is so thin ("only a few hundred molecules thick") and light that its pylons do not support it; rather, they keep it from floating away (p. 242). Perhaps such a thing is possible, in theory, but even diamond, whose carbon-to-carbon bonds are among the strongest of any known material that can currently be synthesized by artificial means, does not exhibit this sort of strength in molecular films. The reader of *The Middle Kingdom* could go either way: accept Wingrove's ice as a given, or not, in which case his city and the plausibility of his novel both collapse.

Wingrove also does not address the probably drastic climatic effects of covering most of the planet's surface with a highly reflective white coating, despite numerous comparisons of the City to homogenous glaciers. It is a glaring oversight.

Similar lapses and inconsistencies arise with regard to the suppression of Western history. Promulgating this hidden knowledge is supposedly punishable by death; even the ministers who reveal the truth to the heirs of the T'angs as they come of age must afterward kill themselves. Despite all this, numerous minor characters throughout the book seem to possess a fairly intimate knowledge of this hidden history. References to the events in both Western and Chinese history that occurred after the first century seem to be common knowledge. The metric system, Christian-era dating and Western economic and political systems not developed until well after the middle ages are all part of this world. English—a Western language that did not develop until well after the fall of the Roman Empire—and not Chinese is the common language of the people of Chung Kuo. In this respect, Wingrove's scenario is so full of holes as to be irritating.

It also seems difficult to believe that all traces of *all* other cultural traditions could be so completely erased in only 150 years from the minds of the city's inhabitants.

The novel contains numerous other implausibilities and loose ends. In one passage, Ben Shepherd, a young man who it seems will play a prominent role later in the series, discovers he is actually a clone. His ostensible parents deny this, and believe it false. One is forced to wonder: did Ben's mother give birth to him or not? If she did, how was the cloned fetus implanted without her knowledge? Wingrove offers not the tiniest hint that this information will be provided.

In another passage, an agent of the T'angs is able to sneak up on a heavily defended starship in orbit with a *light sail*—perhaps the one object that would be visible to the naked eye at a great distance—yet it evades all notice, including radar. The agent's attack on the starship is also written as if it takes place on Earth—its attack has no sense that it actually occurs in a zero-g setting at all. This sort of carelessness and inattention to crucial detail is all the more irritating here, for this scene, in which the destruction of the starship built by the advocates of change touches off an open conflict that will (apparently) dominate much of

the action in later novels, is a climactic point near the end of *The Middle Kingdom*.

One has the impression, amid this profusion of inventive background and detail, of a certain lack of attention to making it all fit smoothly, seamlessly together. Although by and large he has done very well, there are times when Wingrove seems to have included ingenious, clever detail at the expense of consistency and plausibility. At the beginning of the novel, for example, two assassins escaping through a crowded precinct of the city are immediately picked out by the automatic security system as strangers to the area, and must flee (p. 26). And yet, throughout the remainder of the novel, characters come and go as they please undetected by this apparently omnipresent, omniscient security apparatus. There are too many similar instances where some technological innovation is introduced for dramatic effect, then disregarded when it poses an inconsistency later in the novel.

Given that the basic fabric of Wingrove's world is beautiful but somewhat tattered, what sort of garment does he weave from it? How well does he succeed at bringing this world to life, at working within its boundaries to create an engaging narrative?

### Read This Recently read and recommended by Nancy A. Collins:

*Child of God*, Cormac McCarthy—A brilliantly nasty portrayal of a dispossessed, alienated hillbilly's descent into madness. This one has it all: cannibalism, incest, necrophilia, white trash, and moonshine, just to cover the high points. *Child of God* reads like a strange cross-breeding of *Tobacco Road* and *The Hills Have Eyes*. McCarthy is a powerful and uniquely American writer. His work deserves to stay in print.

*The Grand Guignol: Theatre of Fear and Terror*, Mel Gordon—Fun stuff, kids! Gordon provides a much-needed look back at the uniquely Gallic brand of theatre known as the Grand Guignol ("the Big Puppetshow"). An added bonus is a brief list and summary of 100 Guignol plays (titles include "Orgy in the Lighthouse," "The Castle of Slow Death," and "The Horrible Experiment") plus the scripts for two of the most popular productions in the history of the theatre: "The System of Dr. Goudron and Prof. Plumet" and "The Laboratory of Hallucinations." Plus lots of cool gory pictures. An entertaining, educational read.

*Breaks: We Who Are Not as Others*, Daniel P. Mannix—Originally published—and trashed!—in the seventies, Re/Search Publications has seen fit to reprint this memoir of a career caper performer. While Mannix's style lacks polish, the stories he tells are too bizarre not to capture the reader's imagination. In a strange way, the book documents a peculiar version of the American Dream. Performers such as Lintini the Three-Legged Man, Johnny Eck the Half-Boy, and Zip the Whatist attained a level of fame, popularity and relative wealth most "normal" people will never know. *Breaks: We Who Are Not as Others* provides a humane, insider's view of a way of life that has become all but extinct.

*Japanese Ghosts and Demons: Art of the Supernatural*, edited by Stephen Aldiss—This book has some of the strangest—and most beautiful—color reproductions of classic Japanese woodblocks I've ever seen. The chapters go into the historical, cultural, and artistic contexts of Japan's rich mythological tradition. Chapters include "Oni: The Japanese Demon," "The Trickster in Japan," and "The Male Ghost in Kabuki and Ukiyo-e." My favorite plates include Tsuchiya Yoshitoshi's "The Ghost of Okiku," "The Fox Woman Leaving Her Child," and "Fox Cry." Shunkoku Hokusei's "The Lantern Ghost of Oiwa," and Utagawa Kunisoshi's "The Gathering and Gossiping of Various Tools." Fascinating reading.

Surprisingly well. *The Middle Kingdom* has considerable narrative drive; each time I picked it up I went through it in just three days, and whatever other flaws it might have the book makes for compelling reading and good entertainment. Wingrove manages to develop a level of sustained narrative tension remarkable for such a lengthy, complex work . . . remarkable, and yet wearisome, because the tension is relatively unmodulated. Almost every scene is tense, dramatic, charged with portent and consequence, but there are few quiet interludes or breaks in the tension, few soft counterpoints to the grand, sweeping themes. The reader begins to long for a bit more of the mundane amid all the tense action and drama of sweeping historical change.

*The Middle Kingdom* walks along the fine line between drama and melodrama, at times stepping over into one or the other. Many of Wingrove's most important characters are "larger than life," largely gestural, and their behavior highly stylized for (often quite good) dramatic effect. Though they are not flat or two dimensional, they lack the fullness and warmth that would make them seem truly human. These grand, gestural characters are relatively unchanging; they are like actors upon the stage of an ancient Greek theatre, performing their appointed roles with great verve and energy, according to some predetermined destiny they cannot alter. Still, in a novel of this length even the most wooden characters come to acquire a certain depth.

Wingrove's chief villain is a case in point. Howard DeVore, a renegade major in the T'ang's security services who eventually goes underground to help lead the rebellion against them, is a coldly logical tactical genius. As the novel unfolds, he is revealed as a man of ruthless and perverted evil, working toward his own purposes. Yet Wingrove provides only the thinnest shreds of information on DeVore's motives and ends; we learn almost nothing of his background, the forces that shaped his keen, uncompromising intellect, his cool contempt for his fellow human beings, or his repulsive sexual drives. Consequently, this key character comes across as one of the most flat and clichéd figures in the entire novel.

Fortunately, counterbalancing these figures of drama and cliché, Wingrove has also created other characters who spring to vivid life, who possess depth and complexity. It is interesting that most of these are either children or teen-agers—obviously they will mature and move toward the center of action as this series of novels continues. These include Li Yuan, the sensitive younger son of Li Shai Tung, the most powerful of the Seven, who becomes heir when his elder brother is assassinated by the rebels; and Ben Shepherd, the son (or is it clone?) of Li Shai Tung's chief advisor. But it is in the subplot centering on Kim Ward, a young boy rescued from the barbarism of The Clay in the endless darkness beneath the foundations of the City, that Wingrove manages to create his most human characters.

These passages of Kim's introduction to the lower echelons of the city contrast well with the grand drama of events among the powerful ruling elite, for it is here that Wingrove crafts a sustained narrative of

greater length and subtlety. These passages possess a balanced modulation of action and reflective quiet and a sense of continuity not always present in the rest of the novel.

At times it appears that Wingrove is not completely in control of his material—a common problem in so large and ambitious a work. The first half of the novel, and the opening section in particular, is marred by problems of pacing and structure. It is almost as if Wingrove attempts to introduce too much at once, to initiate too many narrative threads, and cannot entirely prevent them from becoming a bit tangled.

There is a confusing multiplication of cuts from scene to scene to scene, the narrative's overall structure and continuity become muddled, and the novel's sense of dramatic tension suffers. This complexity of interwoven plot-lines is further burdened by a number of scenes that are beautiful pieces, yet largely unnecessary, and do little to advance the narrative or to deepen our understanding of the characters. Some of these, descriptive passages clearly modeled on ornate prose-poem descriptions that commonly appear in Chinese literature, stop the story dead in its tracks on more than one occasion.

This disjointed lack of continuity between set-piece scenes and descriptive passages, peopled by dramatic, operatic figures voicing dire warnings of grave and historic import, largely disappears during the second half of the novel. After a rather ragged, choppy start (120 pages!), Wingrove has his material under better control and the narrative begins to develop real momentum. His pacing, his rhythm between action and exposition, his alternation of dramatic tension and quietude are more finely balanced. It is worth noting that this transition occurs largely after Wingrove has introduced his younger, less well-defined characters. As they grow and mature, so too does his novel.

This transition to a more controlled, more carefully modulated narrative offers some encouragement for the success of the remaining novels in the series. Wingrove's *Chung Kuo* is an incredibly ambitious work: a dramatic historical epic of panoramic sweep, peopled with some interesting and memorable characters in a setting filled with inventive and intricate detail that unfolds as an engaging, multileveled narrative of considerable power and beauty.

And yet, right from the outset, it is a work that often falls far short of its ambitious aims. *The Middle Kingdom* is marred by flaws both large and small in its structure, its pacing and its content, flaws that may unfortunately become hugely magnified over the course of a series of seven books, and eventually undermine its strengths altogether.

*Chung Kuo* is Wingrove's first published work of fiction, some six years in the writing. Perhaps a project of such size and scope is a worthy way of conducting one's apprenticeship and debut, but it is apparent that in choosing to tackle such a large and ambitious challenge at the outset, Wingrove has made certain that the *Chung Kuo* novels will be something less than they might have been. ▀

*Richard Terra lives in Seattle, Washington.*

## Take Back Plenty by Colin Greenland

London: Unwin/Hyman, 1990; £6.99 tp; 359 pages

reviewed by Gwyneth Jones

Tabitha Jute is a space age truck driver. She owns her own shuttle: the *Alice Liddell*, basic Fordmobile of the spaceway—four wheels and a board, guaranteed to go if you push it. The *Alice* is an admirable machine—sturdy, tireless, endlessly forgiving. Jute on the other hand is feckless, pugnacious when drunk; a danger to herself and anyone nearby when she's short of money. Since the *Alice* has a control unit (persons) that would pass the Turing test with flying colors, ship and driver are partners in the full bodied movie sense of the term. They soon emerge as the classic "comically mismatched pair" at the heart of a classic comedy thriller. And away we go. From the rose-red ancient cities and tourist-packed canals of Mars, to the steamy jungles of Venus . . . The plot swoops around a gaudily populated fantasy solar system, picking up momentum and debris at every turn. Before long, the whole future of humanity is sailing along with the *Alice Liddell*, on a breakneck collision course with (of course) the Rulers of the Universe.

Colin Greenland, as can be discovered in the biographical resume at the start of *Take Back Plenty*, has been writing about science fiction

for years. His study of one peculiarly British version of the phenomenon ranks as a milestone of sf criticism. Countless reviews, articles, workshops stand to his credit: I'm only one of many aspiring writers to have benefited from his advice and generous encouragement. Given these direly foreboding circumstances, it was probably wise of him to approach the actual writing of sf by cautious degrees. His first full-length fiction (*Daybreak on a Different Mountain*, Unwin, 1984) was a mild existential quest story, the kind of borderline fantasy where only costumes and decor tell you what genre this is meant to be. In two following novels (*The Hour of the Thin Ox*, Unwin, 1986; *Other Voices*, Unwin, 1988), the fiction became more assured. These two slender volumes are books of quiet but growing reputation, among those fantasy fans who can take their stuff without the dilution of fifteen hundred pages of worldsmithing padding. But an air of uneasiness remained. The anorexic effect was perhaps not so much style, as a guilty admission of the writer's inability to take genre trappings seriously.

The technique of misdirection seems to have paid off. There is no

trace of the pedantry or self-distrust of a critic on holiday in *Take Back Plenty*. This is a well-informed book, full of in-jokes and teasing defiance, but it wears its erudition lightly. And though the jokes are clearly important to the writer, there are hints (more than hints) that Greenland could get along perfectly well without them.

The colonized solar system of this (undated) future is a kind of heaven where all good sf images (and some really bad ones) may hope to go when they die. But a "real" never-neverland is also being described. The world of *Take Back Plenty* is no particular world at all. Everything happens in the limbo of subjective time, the state inhabited by hyperspace pilots who don't know what time it is, how old they are, or what the political situation is "at home." There is no home. It's not for nothing that Jute identifies herself with Peter Pan, the boy who never grows up. In this stateless, causeless, hyper-deracinated context, the jokey odd of scenery makes an odd kind of sense. This is the way it is when you abandon normal space-time. Planetary surfaces aren't real for Jute and her kind. They slide by like backdrops, never the same twice. Appropriately, the she-hero's remarkable career is presented not as a *series* but as a random collection of events. Eventually the comedy thriller plot will impose historical order and significance. But the ordering arrow has little place in Tabitha Jute's subjective experience, no more than in the cabin of her long-suffering spaceship.

So, because she has no money and the *Alise* desperately needs an expensive new part, Jute sets off to ferry a cabaret troupe from Mars to the moons of Saturn. The artists have lied about the purpose of her trip. They continue to lie, sharing the ship with them turns out to be hell; the expensive new part never gets bought. . . . There's more to it than that, but in terms of page by page content not a *lot* more. On its covers, Brian Aldiss and Michael Moorcock praise *Take Back Plenty* in gaudily hyperbolic for "a great big galaxy-shaking plot!" "Awesome orchestration, admirable arias. . . ." Thank goodness, this is a pack of lies. The galaxy-shaking aspect of the story is here, but so low-key as to be practically a subtext. The heart of *Take Back Plenty* is a small-scale tragedy about close quarters, bad tempers, and people who drive you crazy. It is *five go mad in a spaceship*, depicted with excruciating verve. Absurdly, given the defiant denial of extrapolation going on everywhere outside the *Alise Liddell*, it reads like a painfully accurate vision of real life in space.

Along with the jungles of Venus, some rather less amiable timetrav-

ellers have crept on board. In 1958 we had evil bug-eyed monsters. In 1990, having once invoked "alien sapient," even in fun, it smacks of real life xenophobia to have them so generally condemned as physically grotesque, bestial, brutal, furry, slimy, stinking, hostile, stupid. There is also at least one point where the well-intentioned and good-humored writer seems to be tripped up by 1990 marketing laws. At least a little reality-violence is required. Therefore Jute and a female companion fall into the hands of beastly, brutal pirates (male and/or alien). The scene fades out on imminent aggravated rape. We meet the girls again next day, nursing a few bruises. There's a failure of nerve here, as well as of taste. Going by the grisly foreplay, what was really going to happen to Tabitha and her friend would have left them (at best) barely able to walk or talk for months. But *Take Back Plenty* can't handle that. Nor can it discuss why rape—specifically, rape; no one wants to gouge their eyes out or anything—is an inevitable consequence of capture for these two. Faultlines of this kind, where genre fun grates against some political or emotional reality, are the hazards of comedy. Colin Greenland is not quite as skillful as, say, Terry Pratchett, at avoiding them.

It would be a shame to give away the plot of a comedy thriller. Suffice it to say that the metafictional humor of canals and jungles—riddled with naked implausibilities and well stirred with New Age conspiracy theory—is carried through without mercy to a rapturously tacky finale. In Greenland's previous fiction, surprisingly real characters did surprisingly intelligent versions of the usual genre things; in rather grudgingly realized fantasy locations. *Take Back Plenty* repeats this pattern on a large scale. The difference is that this time the fantasy location is obviously a place the writer knows and loves—perhaps too well. Still, all in all, it's a brilliant wind-up. But the character of Tabitha Jute is the strength of the book: a cussed, cantankerous, self-centered Han Solo—who saves the world regularly, pulls all the sexy guys, and still ends up all alone in the laundrette of life, watching her socks go round: She can't understand it. But we can, dear reader. That's what makes *Take Back Plenty* more than immensely readable clockwork; and makes me eager to read the real, no-fudging sf novel that Greenland is going to write next. ▶

Gwyneth Jones is the author of *Divine Endurance* and *Escape Plans*. *Take Back Plenty* is to be published in the U.S. by Avon, Spring 1991.

### **In Between Dragons by Michael Kandel** New York: Bantam Books, 1990; \$3.95 pb; 181 pages reviewed by Fernando Q. Gouvêa

Michael Kandel's first novel, *Strangers Invasion*, was quite interesting: it used standard sf tropes and situations to satiric effect, and had the courage of taking its premise to the bitter ending it decidedly implied. Published as a "Spectra Special Edition," it seems to have been well received. Now comes time for the encore, and we have *In Between Dragons*.

In many, if not in most, ways, this continues in the same satiric vein as *Strangers Invasion*; the main character is a teenager named Sperm who has found that he can phase into fantasy worlds, most of them based on standard scenarios for role-playing games (though often with a added twist). The point is that he really lives inside these worlds for a time, and the story intertwines several such lives with "real" life, at first sequentially, one scene from each world. Later, after Sperm has introduced a disturbing force into the fantasy multiverse, the worlds begin to get mixed together in a confusing (and perhaps dangerous) way.

Perhaps the most interesting of the fantasy scenarios, at first, is McGulveyland, a quasi-utopian fantasy world ruled, it seems, by one Mr. McGulvey, who has abandoned "reality" to live there. It is peaceful and well-ordered, in dramatic contrast to the other fantasies, which are "adventures" of one sort or another, and also to reality, which is far from pleasant.

From there on, things go pretty much as one would predict given this set-up. The disturbing element is, of course, sex, which Sperm introduces by smuggling a pornographic book into Mr. McGulvey's library (which is a sort of central station for the various adventures). The

adventures get more and more depressing, their various goals become clearly unachievable, and real life seems to evolve slowly in the direction of maturity, which is finally achieved in the rejection of fantasy at the end (after a stunning *deus ex machina* when Mr. McGulvey shows up in reality).

One can almost read the book as non-sf, by taking the fantasy worlds as, well, fantasies. Taken as sf, it's a little unsettling, because it self-destructs in two ways. First, the whole point of the book is to render the fantasies pointless. Second, the wholesale destruction of the fantasy worlds by the "Lust Kittens" from Sperm's dirty book is taken all too lightly: Sperm feels some guilt, but not too much, and otherwise all the death and destruction is shrugged off, which makes it feel totally unreal.

What bothers me the most, however, is the extreme unpleasantness of Sperm himself and the life he leads. He is the quintessential obnoxious teenager, with little regard for other people and a certainty that he suffers more from them than he really deserves. He thinks his life is horrible (which of course is the reason for all the fantasies), but most of the horror is of his own making. (I just hope all this isn't meant to be funny.) And the final male-bonding business between Sperm and Mr. McGulvey is just too simple an answer.

At the same time, however, one must say that all this is very well done. The book is short, and the story flows well, and one almost begins to care. But, alas, never more than almost. ▶

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## Harlan Ellison: An Introduction

Continued from page 1

occasionally inspired, and often simply terrible. Like many professional authors (professional in the sense that they actually earned their living from writing for a variety of markets), he referred to these stories as "sales," because a "sale" meant real money and recognition for further sales, while a story was just a story. Ellison's first professional sales appeared in science fiction magazines in 1956, but by the middle of that year, he was also contributing fiction to "suspense" magazines such as *Gully, Trapped, Hunted, and Manhunt*, as well as to such men's magazines as *Adm., Gent, and Dime*. Some twenty-nine stories in all appeared that year, only eleven of them in science fiction magazines. In 1957, the number of sales rose to an astonishing eighty-four (forty-one in the sf magazines), and by the end of that year the name Harlan Ellison (or its most common variant, Ellis Hart) was well-known not only to science fiction readers, but also to whoever it was that bought the violent, digest-sized crime magazines and the men's magazines. It little mattered that some of the stories Ellison published in these magazines were surprisingly sensitive and intelligent; a good many of them were clunkers by any standard. In either case, the readership of such magazines was in all probability not inclined to reward the authors with literary accolades and thoughtful attention.

Ellison had wanted to be an author with a vengeance, and he became one with a vengeance (in more ways than one, since vengeance would later prove to be one of his enduring themes). Seeing a name similar to his on a 1950 novel of juvenile delinquency (Hal Ellison's *Tomboy*), he decided he might gain recognition by writing a book about teenage gangs; having perhaps read too much Hemingway, he believed the only way to write was from one's own experience, and if that meant surreptitiously joining such a youth gang, he would; he ran with a gang called the Barons for ten weeks in Brooklyn in 1954. His first books—*Web of the City* (published as *Rumple*, 1958), *The Deadly Streets* (1958), *Memoirs from Purgatory* (1961)—were based on this experience, and they generally show a lot more thought and effort than most of his magazine fiction from this period. But they were paperback originals, and came at a time when paperback originals were still largely invisible to book reviewers and librarians. And by the late fifties, the boom in exposés about teenage crime had passed its peak and was no longer news. (Television, on the other hand, was just catching wind of it, and Ellison's *Memoirs from Purgatory* provided the basis for an hour-long drama starring James Caan and Walter Koenig on *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour* in 1963).

So Ellison might have been known as a teen crime author, like his near-namesake Ellison, but his timing was a little late. He might have been known as a television author, too, and indeed eventually garnered a considerable reputation in this field, winning Writer's Guild of America awards for teleplays more often than anybody. But TV's "Golden Age" of writers, dominated by the likes of Paddy Chayefsky, Reginald Rose, Robert Alan Arthur, and Rod Serling, was also in decline, and by the time Ellison moved to Hollywood in 1962, there were few opportunities for writers to build reputations in television. In Hollywood, he worked on a few feature films (such as the 1963 *The Oscar*) and contributed scripts to programs as varied as *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* and *The Flying Nun*, but only gained real recognition when he returned to science fiction, a field which he probably knew better than most other Hollywood writers. In 1965, the same year "Repent, Harlequin!" appeared, he won the first of his four Writer's Guild awards for an episode of the science-fiction series *The Outer Limits*. In 1967, he would win another for an episode of *Star Trek*. He had become a Hollywood writer, all right, but his greatest recognition came as a Hollywood science fiction writer.

In 1961, Ellison published four books, and none of them were science fiction (his only science fiction book to date has been an Ace "Double" which featured a collection of short stories on one side and a short novel on the other, when you flipped it over; this was a favorite marketing trick of Ace for genre fiction in the early 1950s). All four books were paperback originals. One of them, *Gentleman Junkie* and *Other Stories of the Hung-Up Generation*, found its ways into the hands of Dorothy Parker, then writing occasional reviews for *Esquire*, and her favorable review impresses and moves Ellison to this day. Reviews of

paperbacks of any sort were rare enough, but a review by one of the legends of New York literary life was nothing short of extraordinary for a collection of short stories published by a small paperback house in Evanston, Illinois. Ellison must have entertained the notion that he might be a Writer after all, that there were real stories among his "sales," that he had the talent to pursue opportunities in the literary culture at large. And indeed he did have the talent to pursue such opportunities—but probably not with stories like those in *Gentleman Junkie*. The hip, early-sixties tone of many of those stories, most of them originally published in men's magazines, would come to seem as dated in its way as the tough, moralistic tone of the juvenile delinquent stories. If Ellison had arrived too late to be Hal Ellison or Paddy Chayefsky, he was also too late to be Jack Kerouac or Herbert Gold, no matter how well-crafted and powerful some of his stories in this vein are.

Throughout this period, the constant stream of broad-and-butter stories in the science fiction and suspense magazines never ceased. The timing of one's career was not an issue in these magazines; authors produced what the editors wanted; editors wanted what readers would buy; and readers' tastes didn't change much. To be sure, there was stylistic and thematic experimentation going on in the science fiction and mystery fields—*Galaxy*, we've already seen, was expanding the scope of satire in science fiction, and *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* was helping to create a milieu for the more sophisticated character-oriented mysteries of a Ross MacDonald or a Joe Gores. But these magazines were at the top of the market, and Ellison was not selling at the top of the market. ("Repent, Harlequin!" in 1965, was his first sale to *Galaxy*.) *Amazing*, which had the distinction of having been the first science fiction magazine when it began in 1926, had fallen on hard times, and Ellison had become one of a stable of writers producing stories almost to order (three of his stories appeared in a single issue of *Amazing* in March of 1957, one of them written to match a thoroughly absurd cover illustration of a giant insect about to rape a sunbather). *Amazing's* sister magazine, *Fantastic*, was not much better, but both were a cut above *Super-Science Fiction*. In the mystery field, similar magazines were *Trapped*, *Gully*, and *Sure-Fire Detective Stories*. In such markets, an author became known to the editor for reliability in meeting deadlines, and to the reader for consistency and frequency of appearance, not for development and growth. Ellison produced an astonishing amount of dreck for these magazines, but when he began to select certain stories for book publication, it meant his name would be recognized.

If we were to go back and look at these early stories for evidence of the talent that seems so obvious in "Repent, Harlequin!" we would find, for example, a story called "Are You Listening?" in the December 1958 *Amazing*. It remains one of Ellison's most moving and mature fantasies, and it is in no sense a science fiction story at all. We would find, as early as 1956, a story called "The Cradles," which suggests, like "Harlequin," that the lunatics may be the only ones who really know how to live. We would find "The Abnormals" (later reprinted under its manuscript title, "The Discarded"), which clearly is a science fiction story, but which addresses alienation and betrayal in a way that is most unusual for the fiction that surrounded it in *Fantastic* in 1959. We would find an unexpectedly complex exploration of the moral dilemmas underlying the civil rights movement in "Daniel White for the Greater Good" and a touching portrait of an optimistic loser in "GRK—A Many-Flavored Bird"; neither story is remotely fantastic. There is, in short, much evidence of the growth and development of a major talent, but it is evidence buried in a mass of undistinguished "sales" to undistinguished magazines.

"Repent, Harlequin!" was no accident, then, but it did win the prizes. And suddenly everyone knew that Harlan Ellison—an author whose trademark had been nothing if not versatility—was a science fiction author. Ellison didn't do much at first to dissuade them. Dorothy Parker may have seen his talent as a mainstream short story writer, but few others in the literary world had. The world of juvenile delinquent fiction was already fast receding into the past, and Hollywood was—well, Hollywood. "Repent, Harlequin!" at least gave Ellison a clear identity, and for a while it looked as though he would be what everyone wanted him to be. He collected two huge volumes of original science fiction stories by various authors (*Dangerous Visions*, 1967, and *Again, Dangerous Visions*, 1972), and sprinkled them

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liberally with introductions and anecdotes demonstrating how involved he was with science fiction people and the science fiction world. He became the leading superstar at science fiction conventions. Between 1965 and 1967, he published three collections of fantastic stories, and even though not all the stories were science fiction, the books were labeled as such. During the same period, he published a short novel in book form (*Deusman*) and the first of his *Dangerous Visions* anthologies. His blurbs called him "the best-selling science fiction writer in the world" (although he wasn't), and when the "New Wave" of stylistically experimental science fiction was imported from Britain, it was Ellison whom *The New Yorker* labelled "the chief prophet of the New Wave in America."<sup>1</sup> In 1968, the World Science Fiction Convention presented him with two Hugos and a special plaque for *Dangerous Visions*. Another Hugo followed in 1969, and another Nebula in 1970, and another special plaque in 1972, and more Hugos in 1974 and 1975, and even an Edgar Award from the Mystery Writers of America in 1974 (for "The Whimper of Whipped Dogs," a harrowing fantasia on the Kitty Genovese murder). Ellison was not only a science fiction writer—he had, at least for the time being, become one of the leading science fiction writers in the world.

But curiously, he continued to publish the bulk of his fiction elsewhere. In 1966, the year after "Repent, Harlequin!" "only one of Ellison's eight published stories appeared in a science fiction magazine. In 1967, it was only one in nine, and the one was "I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream," a nightmarish story about humans kept alive and tortured by a hostile computer after a nuclear war had wiped out the rest

of humanity. Just as radically different in tone and structure from "Repent, Harlequin!" " was "Pretty Maggie Moneyeyes," which appeared the same year and described a girl, victimized by the world of Las Vegas, whose soul haunts a slot machine. Ellison seemed to be telling his readers that, if he had to be regarded as a science fiction writer, he would not be any particular kind of science fiction writer. Increasingly, he would come to tell them this directly, in the introductions and commentary that he so liberally sprinkled in his story collections, in myriad interviews, in the various columns and essays that he would eventually collect into books of their own, even on network TV talk shows like Tom Snyder's *Tomorrow*. The bulk of his fiction, he argued, was not science fiction at all, much of what remained was science fiction only in the broadest sense, he himself knew little science, and even his work as an editor (most notably with the *Dangerous Visions* anthologies) was better described by the more broadly defined term "speculative fiction" rather than by "science fiction." And then he would sit in the window of a science fiction bookstore and write a story a day for a week.

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Harlan Ellison is one of the most significant American writers to emerge from the commercial short fiction markets of the 1950s. While in many ways this is a modest claim, it disguises a much broader and ongoing crisis in American fiction of which Ellison is only the most visible example—or victim. Readers who approach Ellison's fiction (and nonfiction) without preconceptions regarding its science fiction content are likely to agree with Ellison's own assessment that, while most of his best stories contain some element of the fantastic, the apparatus of science fiction are often notable for their absence. Magical

<sup>1</sup>"The Talk of the Town: Evolution and Ideation," *The New Yorker*, September 16, 1967.

transformations abound, gods and demons appear onstage, curses are fulfilled, and hidden forces work toward some secret justice—but seldom are such events conveniently rationalized by time machines or alien invaders. A reader encountering such things in a story by Isaac Bashevis Singer or Julio Cortázar would hardly be inclined to read the story as science fiction; why is Ellison such an exception among modern fantasists?

Part of the answer should already be obvious. Ellison began as a science fiction fan, and became a "personality" in that strange little world of "fandom" before he had even sold his first story. And when he did begin publishing, the science fiction fan recognized and rewarded him in ways that the readers of his other fiction—published largely in suspense, mystery, or men's magazines—could not. The science fiction community thrived on "fanazines," letter columns, conventions, and awards to a much greater extent than did most other popular genres. Those who read the mystery and suspense magazines did so largely as a hobby, and seldom cared who else was reading them. Those who read the fiction in men's magazines did so half in secret, since throughout the fifties the sales of such magazines came increasingly to depend on the titillating photo layouts interspersed among the fiction and articles. But those who read science fiction, even while keeping their magazines disguised behind *The Saturday Evening Post* for the benefit of family and friends, became almost desperately public about their enthusiasms when they encountered other readers or fans. And since the 1930s, at least a small portion of those fans had organized themselves into clubs or networks of correspondents, spurred on by the populist criticism that evolved from the letter columns of the magazines themselves and later by the "fanazines" devoted to such commentary and gossip.

These readers recognized a talent in Ellison even when the talent seemed barely visible. By the late 1950s, letters to such magazines as *Fantastic Science Fiction* were asking for more Ellison stories, and by June of 1957—less than a year and half since his first story has seen print—he was described in a story note in *Fantastic Universe* as "without a doubt one of the most widely known and discussed writers in the field" and the "author of an astonishing number of stories."<sup>9</sup> The awards that Ellison was repeatedly receiving by the late sixties, and that led to his being among the most honored of contemporary writers, came from science fiction readers and writers. (Although Ellison has also received awards from such non-genre organizations as the Screen Writers' Guild and P.E.N., the Hugo and Nebula Awards for science fiction have been the most widely promoted by his publishers and have received the widest attention within the field.)

Ellison's *Dangerous Visions* anthologies further cemented his reputation as a major influence in science fiction, and those anthologies—whose contributors were mostly science fiction authors—have often been cited as a watershed in the recent history of the field. In 1971, Ellison published a retrospective collection of his own work, *Alone Against Tomorrow: Stories of Alienation in Speculative Fiction*, and while this was by no means intended as a formal farewell to the science fiction milieu, it could persuasively be argued that it is the last of Ellison's collections that could be fairly characterized as science fiction. Even as his own work veered increasingly toward the ruminative and the metaphorical, however, Ellison remained active in science fiction circles, kept in touch with science fiction fans and writers, and appeared at conventions. It is no exaggeration to say that science fiction had claimed him, and did not want to let him go despite his protests. At the same time, Ellison remained interested in and sympathetic toward writers who worked to develop the possibilities of science fiction, and did not want to forsake his connections with the field entirely.

Science fiction and fantasy writers often speak of a "ghetto," by which they mean a variety of forces that combine to restrict authors to certain commercial markets, and that hence confine their writing to modes and styles acceptable to those markets. Anthony Boucher, one of the most influential critics and editors in the science fiction and mystery fields during the fifties, claimed in a 1953 essay that these forces arose from the tendency among readers of popular fiction to buy books and magazines by category; the tendency among publishers and booksellers to respond to the readers according to these categories; the

tendency among writers to specialize in certain specialty markets (and thus, presumably, gain a more predictable income); and the more pervasive tendency among critics and what might be called the "literary culture" at large to distinguish between "serious" and "popular" fiction.<sup>10</sup> Boucher's essay appeared near the very end of the so-called "pulp era," a period which, during its heyday in the 1930s, had seen a balkanization of popular fiction unlike anything before or since. In the mid-thirties, some two hundred pulp magazines reached a combined audience of over ten million readers each month, and the categories of formula fiction that they published grew ever more specialized: love stories, western stories, western love stories, science fiction, mystery, horror, jungle adventure, war stories, aviation stories, superhero stories, sports stories, "Oriental menace" stories—each had their own magazines, their own readers, and their own set of reader expectations. As the pulp markets waned in the forties and fifties, many of these categories were adopted by the paperback publishing houses which gained prominence after the war. By 1940, Robert de Graff of Pocket Books had discovered that sales of Agatha Christie mysteries improved if more than one were displayed together, and mysteries thus quickly emerged as an identifiable "genre" in paperback book displays. Romances, westerns, and science fiction eventually followed, and became staples of the paperback industry. Although the era of overspecialization of the pulps was at an end by the fifties, this smaller number of "ghettos" was perpetuated by the paperbacks and by the digest-sized magazines which continued to be launched with remarkable frequency throughout the first half of that decade. Between 1950 and 1960, more than a hundred and fifty new magazines were started in the mystery, suspense, science fiction, fantasy and horror fields alone. These were the markets that Ellison began writing for, and their appetite for instant, sensational fiction was such that the paperback market—which looked tawdry enough on its own terms—began to appear to authors as a distinct step toward respectability. Hardcover publication meant genuine prestige.

Historians of popular genres such as mysteries and science fiction have often pointed to the garish covers of the pulps and their descendants as one reason the fiction in these magazines could so easily be dismissed as subliterary. Certainly, the violent, colorful cover illustrations—designed to compete with increasing hysteria on crowded newsstands filled with other hysterical pulp covers—did not encourage readers to expect thought-provoking fiction. Nor did the cheap, short-lived acidic pulp paper on which the magazines were printed and which gave them their nickname. Nor did the endless ads for trusses and bodybuilding regimens that paraded through the back pages of each issue. It is easy to imagine that authors writing for such magazines, like today's television writers, did not expect their work to last much more than a week or a month. (Even TV writers now have the possibility of syndication to keep their work alive, but the early pulp writers by and large had no notion that their work would ever be reprinted, much less anthologized and later studied by academic critics and scholars of popular fiction.) Just as there was much in the physical appearance of the magazines that argued for their summary dismissal from the precincts of literature, so was there much in the fiction itself that was hopelessly formulaic and unrewarding. If a talented writer worked for such magazines, his best work stood a good chance of disappearing, to be rediscovered years later, if at all. Occasionally, such a talented writer would escape the ghetto by writing successful novels, or would survive past the pulp era to find himself (since these authors were overwhelmingly male) in another kind of ghetto in the fifties. Dashiell Hammett is an example of the former kind of writer, and even in his case it was a matter of decades before his fiction began to be viewed as anything but skilled hardboiled detective writing. Fritz Leiber, Stanley Ellin, and to some extent Harlan Ellison are examples of the latter. Long after the institution that had spawned the popular fiction ghettos had died, the ghettos themselves proved such a powerful marketing tool that they survived, becoming a kind of golden cage which offered authors steady sales while keeping them isolated from the literary culture at large.

Ghetto fiction is different from "mainstream" fiction in the way it is read as well as in the way it is sold. Whether the difference is a matter

<sup>9</sup>Boucher in Bretton, 1953.

<sup>10</sup>Russell Nye, page 215.

<sup>11</sup>Thomas L. Bonn, *Under Cover*, page 40.

<sup>12</sup>Note to "Commuter's Problem," *Fantastic Universe*, June, 1957, page 44.

# Boskone 28

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of simple formulas, as in the classical detective story, or what critic and writer Samuel R. Delany calls "protocols"—a complex of expectations which actually alter the way the language of a story is understood—the fact is that a work of mainstream literature is received in terms of T. S. Eliot's tradition and the individual talent. If the author's talent is deemed significant, the work need not partake of current trends or fashionable subject matter (although it often does). If the work itself is deemed significant, readers will see it in terms of the grand tradition of the novel or the aesthetic development of the short story form. Ghetto fiction addresses lower expectations in the reader; individual talent is likely to be evaluated in terms of craftsmanship, and the tradition to which a work is related is likely to be a narrow and less challenging one. Readers and critics are likely to relate mysteries to other mysteries or science fiction works to other science fiction works, either of the current year or of the past few years. Genre fiction is seldom seen, even by its most ardent admirers, as a significant part of the history of the novel or short story, or as a work to be evaluated entirely on its own merits. As mystery novelist Hilary Waugh writes of his own genre:

The mystery novel does not contain the equipment to carry messages. It is too frail a box to hold the human spirit. It allows

an author to speak, but not to explore and instruct. The credo can be expressed as follows: "If you want to write and have nothing to say, write a mystery." If you have other ambitions, the mystery form had best be eschewed.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, when an author such as John Le Carré or P. D. James produces a work that transcends the generic expectations of a particular ghetto, it is with some amazement that critics and readers proclaim he has written a "real" novel. Ghetto fiction is compared with other ghetto fiction; mainstream fiction is compared to whatever is dictated by the terms of the fiction itself.

More importantly, ghetto fiction is not defined by subject matter or plot, as simple formula analysis would lead us to expect. Frank Herbert's galaxy-sweeping *Dune* novels were widely seen as an extension and enrichment of a long tradition of galaxy-sweeping science fiction epics; Doris Lessing's galaxy-sweeping *Canopus in Argos* novels were seen as part of a much broader and deeper tradition of visionary literature. (Conversely, within the science fiction community,

<sup>4</sup>Hilary Waugh, "The Mystery Versus the Novel," in *The Mystery Story*, ed. John Ball (New York: Penguin, 1978), p. 75.

Herbert's *Dune* was regarded as a masterpiece of disciplined imagination, while Lessing's novels were seen as flawed by the author's lack of familiarity with the tradition of space epics.) How then, does one tell a ghestory from a "real" story? Why is one novel a mystery, and another a complex human drama using a mystery framework? Why is one novel a western, and another a profound morality tale? Why is one a space opera, and another a visionary parable?

The answer, of course, must lie in the works themselves, and to a lesser extent in their audiences. It is no great revelation to suggest that popular literature is aesthetically conservative, or that bestsellers tend to address particularly public concerns or reinforce particular public anxieties. Ghetto literature is conservative in a particular way: by addressing a narrower and more clearly defined audience than the bestseller, its freedoms and restrictions are different from those of other forms of popular literature. In some cases, these freedoms and restrictions are the same thing: a genre writer, for example, often has the advantage of working to a prepared audience, and thus is able to make certain assumptions and take certain shortcuts that might not be otherwise available. The author can manipulate and extend certain conventions and tropes, and if the author is ingenious enough, these very conventions and tropes can provide springboards to more complex constructions of style, character, and plot. In other words, the very devices that define a formula can be used to undercut the formula and deepen the scope of the work—a principle that has been rediscovered by authors from Joseph Conrad and Graham Greene to Ross McDonald and John Le Carré, and a principle that is crucial to understanding Ellison's fiction.

At the same time, this prepared audience and this set of conventions and tropes constitutes a market, and critics of popular fiction have often overlooked the extremely important—and one would think obvious—distinction between the market and the narrative formula. Few of the authors writing "in the trenches" for the pulp and post-pulp digest magazines were ever provided the opportunities afforded to novelists who wished to experiment with genre fiction. Stories had to be written to please editors who varied from the visionary to the barely literate, often on ridiculously short deadlines, and occasionally around already-purchased cover illustrations. And at rates ranging from a half-cent to two cents per word, the sheer volume of fiction required to stay alive as a professional writer was astonishing; sometimes writers would find themselves producing up to 50,000 words a week, and adopting pseudonyms in order to disguise multiple stories in a single issue of a magazine. For a time, Ellison and his friend Robert Silverberg were writing most of the stories for a quintessentially awful magazine called *Super Science Fiction*; neither author today claims that any significant effort was being made to subvert or extend the formulas that this magazine demanded. (Silverberg, in fact, has often commented that he made a promise after graduating from college to publish 50,000 words per month, in order to generate a respectable income, at a penny a word,

of \$500 per month.) Care and craftsmanship were frequently not even realistic options, and while the authors writing for these magazines would occasionally produce a story of real merit, they never seemed quite able to forget the need to please some specific editor. In the pulp magazines and their descendants, there is a distinct correlation between the quality of the fiction published and the quality of the editors at work. John W. Campbell, Jr., the longtime editor of *Amazing Science Fiction* (later *Analog Science Fact/Science Fiction*), is often credited with having almost single-handedly shaped the course of science fiction in the forties and fifties simply by laying down specific ground rules for the fiction he published, making the magazine's readers aware of these ground rules, and working closely with authors to assure that they were adhered to.

For an author such as Ellison, uncomfortable with science fiction to begin with, this combination of circumstances led to some peculiarly awkward work, and it wasn't until he began to write for the men's magazines that his own voice began clearly to emerge. But during his time writing for the popular digest-sized magazines of the fifties, he—like many authors before him—learned principles of story construction and style that today enable him to write stories in the windows of storefronts or on radio programs. He also developed—like many before him—a particular notion of what a story is, and one suspects that some phantom of a pulp magazine editor still peeks over his shoulder as he writes. His stories, even at their most lyrical, retain something of the tone and flavor of popular commercial fiction, and he remains acutely aware of his audience, taking pains through extended introductions and commentary to "bring them along" as his fiction moves in ever more diverse directions. At some point in the 1950s (and definitively in the 1960s), Ellison broke through the anonymity of the pulp writer, and began to speak directly to his readers in an unmistakable voice. But the fear of that anonymity remains, coloring his writing and providing a source for much of his passion. Ellison's writing is not "cool," in the McLuhanesque sense. It involves the reader sometimes in the manner of pulp adventure fiction, and sometimes through the force of a personality that struggled for years to move beyond pulp adventure fiction. Neither mode of involvement is particularly stylish, and neither has helped much in gaining Ellison the audience he deserves. If Ellison is not read in the same way as the Latin Americans he so much admires—García Márquez, Cortázar, Amado—it is partly because of his association with science fiction, but as much because he writes in a uniquely American idiom with which America itself has not yet come to grips. ▶

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*This essay will appear in a forthcoming study of the works of Harlan Ellison, in progress.*

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## **Kalimantan, by Lucius Shepard**

London: Century, 1990; £8.99 hc; 160 pages

## **Entropy's Bed at Midnight, by Dan Simmons**

Northridge, CA: Lord John Press, 1990; \$50.00 hc; 35 pages

reviewed by Robert Killheffer

It is often said that the novella is the ideal form for sf. Some of the most renowned works of the genre first appeared at this length—such as Roger Zelazny's "He Who Shapes" and Gene Wolfe's "The Fifth Head of Cerberus"—even if, as in the case of "He Who Shapes," they were later expanded to full novel length (and often, thereby, weakened, if the truth be told). Even the novels of sf past were far shorter in most cases than those of the present (though this owed much to the fact that most ran first as serials in the digest).

It is heartening then to see that some presses, small and large, are bringing out quality hardcover editions of original novella-length material by some of sf's brightest lights. The smaller presses have been at this for some time—especially those interested in producing very

highly priced collector's editions, such as Cheap Street—but the growth of other small presses in recent years have brought more affordable editions as well, notably from Mark Ziesing (Howard Waldrop's *A Daxen Tough Job*, Kim Stanley Robinson's *A Short, Sharp Shock*) and Pulphouse's Axolotl Press series (Robert Silverberg's *Lion Time in Timbuktu*, George Alec Effinger's *Look Away*), but now we have a big publisher, UK's Century, entering the fray—first with their Hutchinson novellas, which included J. G. Ballard's *Running Wild*, and now with the Legend series, including the likes of Jonathan Carroll, Greg Bear, Ramsey Campbell, Michael Swanwick and Lucius Shepard. (No women writers, though, so far—which is quite a surprise. There are many capable of excellent work at this length: Connie Willis, Pat Cadigan, and

Kate Wilhelm, to name a few.)

Some people might feel cheated with only one longish story per volume—though in the present case, Shepard's *Kalimantan*, the length reaches that of a modest novel. I find the format strangely reassuring, but then I am a lover of the book-as-object, preferring the solid, permanent feel of a well-produced hardcover over the flimsier, transitory sense of a paperback or a monthly pulp digest. The occasional illustrations in the *Legend* editions are an added pleasure, as is the fine cover art. As long as they can keep the prices reasonable, I wish them every success.

So, to the work itself. Lucius Shepard is known for his lush, lyrical, dense and flowing prose, replete with striking, colorful and most of all significant imagery—he has become one of the best prose stylists in the genre. His writings are also remarkable for its energy and conviction. Both traits are present in this latest work as well:

What looked like dust motes were dancing in a shaft of moonlight that slanted down onto one of the shrubs. There was something pagan and strange about the sight, about the pale distinct beam with its crystalline definition touching the agitated tips of the leaves. . . . And then, as ragged blue clouds passed across the moon, this illusion collapsed, and I knew that I was finally alone. (p. 158)

This story shares much with Shepard's other work—a jungle setting, a world-weary and disillusioned narrator, a prevalence of indigenous magical forces which have strong effects on the lives of foreign intruders. Here the jungle is in Borneo rather than Central America, but the connection to Shepard's own life remains—he has traveled there as well.

Shepard's fiction is intensely personal; he writes about himself, and thus in the main his stories are concerned with the pain, suffering, changes, challenges and questions of the narrator's or main character's own personality. They work best when a powerful internal feeling lies not far behind the narrative, carrying off stories at lengths their plots could never uphold alone. In *Kalimantan*, the fever is on Shepard at the beginning and most wildly at the end, but the middle third or so is sparse, less focused and driven than some of his other jungle-set stories. Perhaps an explanation lies in the observation that Shepard's experiences in Central America were exceptionally traumatic and soul-shaking, as he reveals on occasion in his column "Stark Raving" for *Ziesing's Journal Wired*:

1982, that's the time I've been thinking about while writing this, the time that illuminates the event I've been avoiding, because I'm fucking sick of remembering that kind of shit. . . . I remember being so fucking terrified, chased by this little gray Ford full of men in white shirts along a dirt road after searching for a friend at El Playon, where the death squads dumped the bodies of their victims. I remember dust was flying up around the car, the green world disappearing in whirlwinds of dust. . . . The whole country like that, the whole raped, cratered, widowed, amputated, military-advocated place no more than a filthy fly-swarmed lunch counter of Death in the diocese of the Devil. . . . ("Remedial Reading for the Generation of Swine," Spring 1990, pages 172-173).

The passion that inflames Shepard's Central American stories comes in part from the same root as this fire and brimstone; though I know nothing of it myself, it seems likely that his journey to Borneo did not include many such harrowing experiences, and so his inner fire burns cooler here.

Still, many of the same issues find a place in *Kalimantan*, particularly the struggle to reconcile one's older, wiser self to the mistakes and misconceptions now perceived in one's past. The narrator Barnett relates the tale of his struggle with Curtis MacKinnon, a fellow American expatriate, and Barnett regularly mentions the parallels he sees in the younger MacKinnon to himself at the same age, first arrived in Borneo; it is clear that, beneath the story of the two men, there lies a template of the process of revising one's inner psyche, making Kalimantan the self, and Barnett and MacKinnon opposing forces

therein.

Throughout the story Shepard borrows tropes from pulp jungle adventure, but he undermines them, denying the reader traditional payoffs and resolutions. The mysterious drug MacKinnon has found in the jungle promises to give him the power to conquer the world, but where a standard pulp story would paint a diabolical villain in MacKinnon's place and carry the conflict to the very point of such conquest before allowing the hero to vanquish MacKinnon with much straining of thews and letting of blood, Shepard never takes it beyond the suggestion of power, portraying MacKinnon as a fully-rounded, believable and sympathetic character at every turn, and the inevitable confrontation occurs in a quiet jungle clearing, without fireworks or firearms, and is mostly centered in the heart of Barnett, who must weigh the threat MacKinnon poses against his undeniable humanity and pathos. The pulp adventure tropes are representative of an immature American romanticism Barnett recalls in himself and sees in MacKinnon, an adventurousness that is both achingly familiar and wofully ignorant of bald reality—and which Shepard recalls in his younger self as well: "the fool I was, looking for adventure, I guess, or maybe just dicking around, pretending to be an adventurer, but finding adventure anyway, and finding also certain limits in myself, certain tolerances, certain failures" ("Remedial Reading," page 172). When, as is no surprise, Barnett decides he must destroy this part of himself—even while he cherishes it—by killing MacKinnon (who is a mirror of his younger, more romantic self), Shepard is portraying metaphorically an inner process he himself has undergone, and which it seems he continues to experience strongly.

And Shepard offers further thought on this process than he has in previous work. A new struggle emerges after this climactic murder, as Barnett wrestles with his guilt and the ghost of MacKinnon. In the glorious crescendo at the end, Barnett recognizes that neither youthful romanticism nor middle-aged cynicism are wholly correct, that both are attempts to oversimplify the world and life, and he has entered a new period of life, trying to accept this newest wisdom: "I simply don't know anything," he says. "There's nothing I can hold, nothing I can depend on, not even the nastiest of apparent truths" (page 160). The bleak image of MacKinnon's ghost, wandering the jungle and fading back into its own past and finally to nothingness, is a perfect embodiment of the fading of guilt and passion, the erosion of memory, that comes inevitably with the passage of time. Shepard has learned something since his Central American travels shattered his innocent sense of adventure. *Kalimantan* may not always have the fire of his Central American stories, but it does have the wisdom of genuine, thoughtful experience.

Likewise, Dan Simmons's novelette *Entropy's Bed at Midnight* shares much with his other work, and draws its power and conviction from what I suppose to be Simmons's own life. As he did in *Song of Kali* and in one of the central plots of *Hyperion/Fall of Hyperion*, Simmons explores the terror that having a child in an ever-more-dangerous world can bring, and the stifling, even paralyzing effect it can have on the parent. In this story, Simmons shows even deeper feeling than he did in his previous ventures with this theme.

This is partly due to Simmons's growing mastery of and confidence in his craft. *Entropy's Bed at Midnight* is not a story a beginner could write. It shows timing and balance and complexity that require experience and previous success:

Most accidents are like the one Caroline and I just missed yesterday. Broken glass gleaming in the light of flares, Possessions scattered across a hillside. Glimpses of bodies under sheets or still caught in a vice of twisted metal or lying impossibly contorted among the weeds. More blood than you can imagine. There'd been so little blood with Scout. I noticed that as I held him, reassured myself with that fact even as he cooled in my arms (page 33).

In his earlier "Two Minutes, Forty-Five Seconds" Simmons also addresses the fear underlying the illusion of safety in the modern world. He weaves strands of story together tightly and seamlessly, moving from the present action—some aerospace engineers, aboard a plane heading

for a meeting—to bits of memory—the main character's recollections of a *Challenger*-like disaster some years before and of some childhood and Vietnam traumas—to the mental image of a roller coaster, a stream-of-consciousness picture of terror in the main character's mind; he produces in the process a tight, powerful blend that perfectly evokes the potency of youthful fears, the crushing guilt of preventable deaths in hindsight, and the unique brand of horror inherent in modern technology such as planes and rockets and latter-day warfare.

"Two Minutes" does not involve the fears of parent for child, but beyond that specific it is a model for *Entropy's Bed*. Here Simmons weaves real-time action—a father taking his daughter on an amusement park mountain sled-ride, approaching the slide with agonizing glacial patience—with recollections—the father recalling moments from his time in Vietnam, lurid items from his current career as an auto insurance investigator, and the hindsight-preventable death of his son—to create a well-paced, controlled, horrific experience. The details of various unlikely accidents, occasionally gore, function as an undercurrent of chaos, of unpredictable, violent injury and death, which informs every moment of the narrator's approach to the slide. The slide itself mirrors the roller-coaster of the earlier story. For all the likenesses, however, there is a sense of freedom and daring to *Entropy's Bed* that "Two Minutes," or even *Song of Kali*, lacks. Simmons is coming into his own, dancing like Gene Kelly now, making it look easy.

Like Lucius Shepard in *Kelumantan*, Simmons carries his recurrent theme a little beyond his previous attempts. In *Song of Kali*, the child dies, and the parents do eventually manage to overcome the grief and guilt by the end. In the *Hyperions*, the child is saved, and the pain and worry of the parent is denied—in the end, there was no danger at

all, only a misunderstanding of shadowy events. In *Entropy's Bed* as *Midnight*, Simmons plays some of both sides, and comes up with an even better, wiser resolution than before. This parent has suffered one loss already, his son; and though his remaining child (sorry, I'm giving it away) does not die, neither is his terror revealed as unfounded. The father must acknowledge danger in the world, but at the same time he determines to accept it, to revel in what happiness is possible despite the small chance of disaster, and most importantly, to give his daughter the freedom to take chances and risks without letting his fears stifle her.

So, for these two examples, I am happy to report that the novella and novelette forms appear to be stronger than ever. My only complaint with *Entropy's Bed* is that it has appeared in this expensive—too expensive—edition. I couldn't afford one—I read a Xerox copy that I bootlegged from someone else's Xerox copy. I understand that the tiny print run is already sold out, and copies are going for more like \$150 now. As much as I favor quality editions of longer stories like this, I am frustrated by the presses who do only limited, outrageously pricey editions—other examples from recent years include some Gene Wolfe stories—*Slow Children at Play*, *Empires of Foliage and Flower*, and others—from Cheap Street. Cheap these books are not. I haven't been able to read them.

The existence of these books, by some of the most interesting writers of the day, in editions neither I nor anyone I know can afford to buy, is as maddening to me as modern threats to children are to Dan Simmons. I hope, if the Legend novellas succeed (as they seem to be doing), and the collectors' presses allow it, that someone will offer affordable quality versions of these rare items. If not, I may have to resort to theft, and that would be a shame. ▲

## Feminist Issues in Earthsea

**Tehanu: The Last Book of Earthsea by Ursula K. Le Guin**

New York: Atheneum, 1990; \$15.95 hc; 228 pages

reviewed by Tatiana Keller

When *Tehanu: The Last Book of Earthsea* appeared in print, some two decades after its parent volumes, I was considerably startled. From the emphatic tone of the subtitle (the *last* book), I speculated that one of her purposes was to silence the complaints of two groups of readers: those who wished to know "whatever happened to Tenar?" and those who objected to the sketchy depiction of female magic in the original trilogy.

*Tehanu* does in fact focus primarily on these issues. The final result, however, although beautifully written and constructed as is all Le Guin's work, seems unsatisfying. Certainly feminists of either the political or the spiritual persuasion (or both) will be less pleased than ever, both with Tenar's ultimate destiny and with the fuller description of women's magic.

Tenar, as we recall from *The Tombs of Atuan*, was a young girl raised in a cult of dark and nihilistic mysticism whose devotees were all women or eunuchs. Like the Dalai Lama, she was chosen in childhood and held a spiritual position of absolute power, although, as a child, she was still subject to material discipline by her teachers. From this existence, serving a nameless, fearsome power which devours all (her title was the Eaten One), she was liberated by Ged, who literally brought light, both physical and spiritual, into her darkness. In forsaking her duties as priestess she brought ruin to her temple and caused the downfall of the powers she served, but since they were Evil (by the author's arbitrary definition), her act was not seen as a betrayal. Accompanying Ged to Earthsea, she was honored as his helper in returning the Ring of Erreth-Akhe. However, once she had assisted Ged in his quest, she dropped from view completely. Ged made it clear that she could not join him in his travels, and placed her with his old teacher Ogion so her spiritual and psychic powers could be retained.

I have recapped at length to make several points. From the Jungian perspective of storytelling this tale has great symbolic value and is impeccably crafted. It follows the documented Indo-European archetypes, which have been extensively used in intuitive and psychotherapeutic work, especially for children under the age of seven. (See Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment*.) According to the Jungian

model, the archetypes do not represent social roles. The light/male/yang principle personifies the conscious mind, or will; this part of the personality must find, recognize and merge with the dark/female/yin principle, which personifies the unconscious (soul, or emotion) in order to complete its human potential. Astrologically, these principles are illustrated by the Sun and Moon, which represent the active and intuitive aspects of the psyche.

This is the template for traditional "fairy tale" storytelling. The difficulty in this type of storytelling arises when it expands itself beyond the scale of the classic fairy tale. Historically, adult fantasy has been sneered at as "childish" by the mundane world, and there is a reason for this: much of it mimics, imitates or simply reiterates the fundamental fairy tale template, although with more richness of detail. Adult fantasy at its best does not attempt to support the ethical, moral and emotional hypersimplification of preliterary oral tradition; nor should it. The old folktales are primarily religio-psychic in both meaning and intent, and were not supposed to provide literal or material relevance to daily life.

However, in this template Yang does not abandon Yin. The prince and princess do not go their separate ways once their quest is finished. And so the tale of Tenar becomes, not simply (as some feminists have complained) a "passive maiden rescue story," but a significantly more exploitative echo of Theseus' abandonment of Ariadne, or Jason's (eventual) repudiation of Medea.

Why were these three women set aside? Each had powers that rivaled or outstripped her companion's, and which he could not control. Each hailed from a matriarchal religion, and was an initiate of that tradition. In the world of Earthsea, wizardry is seen as a light staving off the all-devouring Dark. Its initiates—all male, and implicitly all celibate—lead a monastic existence of asceticism and intellectual study. The only women seen in the trilogy with magical powers—Serret and Tenar—serve the Nameless Dark. Serret dies because she will not forego her power; Tenar relinquishes her power and lives, but her destiny is unknown.

It seems that the author is so uncomfortable, on some level, with the concept of a powerful woman that she had no interest in writing

David Drake  
**Elfin Pipes of Northworld**  
Volume One of the Trilogy of Trilogies  
SHOW PAGES: Outline to follow

"Faith 'n begorra, master!" cried Bogtrotter Bunny. "What is it under the sun that we have here?"

"Why, what's the matter, Boggie?" replied Galen Goldencurl as he hurried to where his faithful companion sat. The little rabbit was peering at a shadowy something near the ground of this flowery clearing in the Forever Forest.

Galen was tall and slim. He had the form and poise, tufted ears of his father, Pellidur, Prince of the Elves, but his hair and his brilliant sky-blue eyes came from his mother, a beautiful human princess who had vanished the day after she gave birth to her son.

"Tis a terrible thing, master!" said Bogtrotter Bunny, averting his eyes in horror. "Why, look for your own self, for me tongue should cleave to the roof of me mouth should I try to form the words!"

Galen adjusted his gold-strung bow so that he could bend close to his little friend. In the midst of the gorgeous red poppies was a swallow-tailed butterfly. Its wings were black and azure with spots of silver as pure and lovely as the drinking horns in the high hall of Prince Pellidur.

The wings beat furiously, but the butterfly did not rise into the sun-bright air. The insect's legs were caught in a spiderweb, and from a cleft in a crumbling granite outcrop nearby gleamed the spider's furious eyes.

"What!" cried Galen Goldencurl. He leaped to his feet and drew his long, burnished sword Fire-Edge, forged by dwarves from the broken fang of Esclerank, the dragon of Loathly Rain.

Galen's human grandfather, Marnion the Brave, had broken the dragon's fang in single combat, but Esclerank had survived to carry off the hero no-one knew where. Some day, Galen knew, he would find and rescue his grandfather—though he must fight a hundred dragons to do so!

"Oh, save me, noble prince!" the butterfly called desperately.

"Now it's careful you must be, little one," Bogtrotter ordered the butterfly. "Should you touch the blade of the master's noble sword, it will infallibly be the end of you."

With his sword's sharp point, the young elfling parted the strands of the web while the spider's mud-colored eyes glared in anger from the crevice.

When at last the jewel-winged insect was free, it mounted the air and danced joyfully about its savior's head. "Oh, thank you, Galen Goldencurl!" the butterfly trilled, "Though I seem to you a poor, weak thing, know that I will someday repay the service you have done me."

"Go your way, little one," Galen said with a chuckle. "I did no more for you than anyone should do for another living creature."

Then Galen's face hardened and his bright blue eyes seemed to flash with anger. He knelt again beside the granite

crevice. The tufts of hair on his elfin ears pointed forward toward the lurking spider. "As for you, Master Spider—what have you to say for yourself? You know the law the good wizard Bremen set down for the Forever Forest: 'Let none harm another, but all live in peace.'"

"You think you're s-s-o big!" the spider hissed from its hiding place. "You wouldn't talk that way, Galen Goldencurl, if my queen, Mother Gnslyfang, were here."

Galen stood and swept his sword Fire-Edge in a lightninglike arc. The granite outcrop shattered like a melon dashed to the rocks by a fierce wind. On the remnants of the stone squatted the terrified spider, untouched but completely uncovered to the light of day. Green ichor dripped from its tiny mandibles.

"Faith, master, you can slay the ugly creature now!" cried Bogtrotter Bunny. "And no more than the murderous beast deserves for his evil!"

"No, Boggie," said the young elf as he sheathed his sword. "Bremen's law applies to us as well as to others."

He looked down at the cowering spider. "You, Master Eight-Legs," he said. "Leave the Forever Forest or keep her laws. I warn you, the next time I will be less generous."

The spider scuttled off, muttering but looking relieved nonetheless. Galen didn't think he would have trouble with that particular beast again.

But Mother Gnslyfang had many children, and worse monsters still than she were making their appearance recently.

"Ah, master," sighed Bogtrotter Bunny. "It isn't the same, I tell you, since the black day your blessed mother vanished, and the Water of Happiness with her in a crystal vial in her sash. Sure I am that until she and the vial return, there will be no true peace in the Forever Forest."

"Well, Boggie," said Galen, "tomorrow night at the Midsummer Revels I become an adult. Then my father will no longer be able to prevent me from going in quest of my mother. I hope Prince Pellidur will tell me the dark secret I see in his eyes whenever my mother's name is mentioned; but whether he tells me or no, I will follow my sword quest!"

Clear, golden notes like the song of crystal birds hung over the forest, causing all other sounds to hush. Once, twice, a third time; then the piercing call faded into echoes of remorse for its beauty.

"The Elfhorn of Forasill!" Galen said in amazement. "Why is my father summoning all his subjects now, when the Revels are not until tomorrow night?"

"Sure and I couldn't say, master," muttered Bogtrotter Bunny. "But it's sure I am that there's black sorcery somewhere behind it, mark my words!"

And as the little rabbit spoke, a shadow like the wing of a monstrous bat fell across the Forever Forest. ▶

about Tenar as an adept of magic. Even in the current book, her only magic-wielding woman is Aunt Moss, the cackling, illiterate, unkempt witch. She is an embodiment of every caricature drawn from medieval Christian tradition, which generated the images of witches seen in European fairy tales. This witch image is, in fact, a degenerated form of the Sage Woman, the Old Wise One, third of the manifestations of the Triple Moon Goddess, she who is Maiden as she waxes, Mother at the full, and Crone as she wanes, only to wax again. But why does the author, who has demonstrated a genuine reverence in her previous work for both the aging process and the rhythm of nature, choose to depict her as half-incoherent, uneducated, and dirty?

The association of devouring darkness with women's magic and women's spirituality echoes 1) the post-Pelagian (Atheno-Spartan) Greek culture, which exalted male intellectuality and attempted to suppress the much older Eleusinian rite (as well as the even more ancient Minoan religion) and 2) the Judeo-Hellenic/Christian traditions which developed as maimed remnants of the Mesopotamian, Anatolian, and Egyptian goddess worship. The Ishtar/Tammuz, Cybele/Attis and Isis/Osiris rites all centered around a Great Goddess who was mate and mourner to her lover, the dying and resurrecting grain god. He was the harvest, cut down and sown to grow again; she was both womb and tomb, and womb once more. When rebirth is taken from the mother



and made an independent male function, the womb/tomb becomes a dark and terrible place indeed. Who were the Nameless Ones that Ténar served? Evil, devouring nihilistic powers? Or the deities of a matriarchal tradition such as that of Crete, whose initiate was seduced away by God/Theseus and then abandoned once she had served his purpose?

In order to complete Ténar's story without violating the basic foundations of Earthsea—for a woman mage would have challenged the social, political and magical foundations of the world Le Guin created—and still counter feminist complaints, Ténar had to become a victim of patriarchal oppression. She is seen in *Tehanu* some twenty years later, a middle-aged farmwoman. We are told that she left her magical studies because they were "dead" and because they alienated her from other women; that in order to be a true woman she had to take up the same destiny as her peers; that she married herself off to some local farmer who, we gather (she is now a widow), was not a particularly nice or enlightened guy, who apparently treated her with casual scorn; that she has two children she is not very close to (especially the son, who surfaces briefly in the novel and is a classic Macho Jerk); and that she does a little bit of local healing on the side, just like all the other village grannies.

I cannot think of any more quietly devastating way for Le Guin to simultaneously support and endorse every poisonous myth fed to young girls about Real Womanhood—you have to get married, you have to have kids, don't be too smart, don't stand out from the crowd, be just like the other girls—get a guy, any guy, just so you get a guy—and trash her own carefully conceived secondary world. In the course of the novel, all the sympathetic protagonists are in some way victims—Ténar the widow, Ged the now-powerless ex-wizard, Therru the abused child, Heather the half-wit, Aunt Moss the crazy witch—of a callous, sneering, unrelenting patriarchy. All suffer unquestioningly and sullenly hastily out of the way. Every male smile conceals an ulterior motive; every male gesture is either threatening or condescending. It is inconceivable that the Ged or the Vetch of *A Wizard of Earthsea* would have treated their female or youthful clients in such a fashion: wizards, at least (when not corrupted by power), were gentle and courteous to all. But even the mages we meet in *Tehanu* are proud, aloof, and openly hostile to Lower Forms of Life. Apparently corruption is epidemic. And the rest of the populace seems even worse.

This is political overkill, and poor artistic judgment (as it was in *The Word for World is Forest*). It seemed unnecessary for the author to pack her book so full of injustice, of unkindness, to the detriment of all she had created before. What she has produced is an appalling *mae culpa* for her instinctive artistic choices, which were genuinely motivated and

reflected her own inner truth.

And yet, for all the apology, we are left at the end of *Tehanu* with the same unresolved dilemma that ended *Athrau*. What of the girl-child Therru? Will her powers be developed? She has been freed from the alternatives that defecated Ténar: her tears will bar her from marriage, so she has no competing domestic destiny to reroute her. But what will she become? At the end of the book—the *far book*, we are reminded—her potential remains untapped. She offers, as did the young Ténar, a possibility for change, for new ways, new ways for magic, new ways for women. And like Ténar's, her fate cannot be described, because the author cannot envision it. She can only hint.

I appreciate the author's honest efforts to respond as she has to what she, evidently, agrees are shortcomings in her trilogy. I am sorry to see her trying so hard to present answers that will placate everyone, and doing so much damage to her own previous work in the process. It is almost impossible to write from a viewpoint one doesn't entirely comprehend, even if one is sympathetic to it. I believe Le Guin understands the concept of patriarchal oppression, but I'm not sure she comprehends what some women desire in its place, perhaps because she is genuinely satisfied with her life. It might be inconceivable to her that some of us would want Ténar and Therru and all the little Aunt Moss-to-be-in Earthsea to train at Roke, just like the boys, to become mages, to work wizardry: not in defiant hostility, but in harmony and love. It might be inconceivable that some of us, in Ténar's shoes, would have seen the other women's alienation, not as pressure to conform, but as an opportunity to open their eyes to new horizons. Few of us would tell a ghetto kid who won a Harvard scholarship to turn it down and take a job at the local gas station so as not to alienate his friends; and yet this is (in my eyes—and I'm sure in those of many women readers) what Le Guin, speaking through Ténar, is recommending. Even Ténar's ultimate relationship with Ged is not conducted wizard to wizard, as psychic equals, but powerless to powerless—he has sunk far enough, now, that he is finally down at her level, and she feels able to approach him.

I found reading *Tehanu* an extremely painful experience, especially in light of the admiration I have felt for her previous work. However, it is to the author's credit that she has attempted to re-examine her material from a very different perspective than that used in the previous three books. I wish her all the best in her next literary endeavor. ▶

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## **The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror: Third Annual Collection** edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling

New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990; \$24.95 hc, \$14.95 tp; 563 pages  
reviewed by Robert Devereaux

And yet a third time, two editors who continue to awe and delight us with their devotion to their devotion to the lit fantastic—tales that skew glancingly or violently off the norm in order to reveal it under new light—have cast their nets wide and hauled onto the shores of these pages forty-four stories and three poems. They also generously provide two essays which summarize the year's activity in fantasy and horror, Ed Bryant's comments on 1989 media efforts, James Freckle's remembrance of the newly dead, and honorable mentions for hundreds of worthy contenders—as well as regrets for being unable to include several dozen equally deserving stories in their final cut.

As in any endeavor of this kind, each reader is bound to have personal favorites whose omission puzzles—mine is David J. Schow's "Jerry's Kids Meet Wormboy," an over-the-top splatterpunk story from *Book of the Dead* which I'm pleased to find Karl Edward Wagner has given the coveted last slot in his *Year's Best Horror Stories*. There are also going to be some selections which leave one cold, stories which, despite their other merits, one finds slight or confusing or otherwise off the mark. Eight or so had that effect on me, and I'll try to explain why later in essay.

But the overwhelming majority of selections are very strong indeed and attest to the good health—speaking only metaphorically of course, not psychologically—of fantasy, dark and light, these days. The follow-

ing discussion will devote most of its attention to what makes stories of this kind successful, then consider why the failures fail, and finally give praise to those stories which stand out as best of breed.

In mulling over the reasons each story worked, I came up with a number of qualities that contribute to effective storytelling. The merely good stories tend to be strong in one or two of these qualities, while the best, as we'll see later, exhibit several of them or use the ones they do exhibit to superb effect.

The first quality I identified was assured writing. All the stories in this collection show assurance in the handling of narrative prose, but there are of course degrees of assurance, and three stories are particularly good in this way: Steven Millhauser's "The Illusionist" is a *tour de force* of literary prestidigitation, as one Eisenheim, a world-class magician at the turn of the century, relies less and less on physicality to perform his feats of legerdemain. Gwyneth Jones' "The Lovers" is a poignant rendering of *Psyche*'s foiled attempts to reunite with her lost love in the modern world. And for sheer narrative drive, nothing in this collection can touch Joe Lansdale's "The Steel Valentine," in which the entrapped victim of an avenging husband barely escapes being dog-chomped to death and then turns the tables on his tormentor.

The second quality is characters that interest us, either because we can empathize with them or because they are strong or quirky in some

way. The best example of the latter is the psychopath-on-a-leash in Pat Cadigan's "The Power and the Passion," a character whose inner war makes him the ideal vampire killer. In "A Bird That Whistles," Emma Bull does a fine job of painting the camaraderie of two musicians, one of whom happens to be a *facier* who teaches the other emotional sharing. The main character in James Blaylock's "Unidentified Objects" must choose—and chooses badly—between the possibility of UFO travel and his infatuation with a beautiful woman. The loss of love itself is hauntingly treated in Charles de Lint's "Timecap," wherein Gordie loses Samantha to a ghost-lover caught in a timewarp. In Michael Swanwick's "The Edge of the World," however, what chills is not what young Donna loses but what she gains when her wish comes true—to know what is really going on behind the games people play, to know "what the situation is" at all times.

The third quality that makes for a worthy story is a twist on an old theme. Thus, in Ed Bryant's "A Sad Last Love at the Diner of the Damned," love endures in a zombie convet, who tries to protect the waitress he once loved from attack rather than joining the mayhem against her. In Dan Simmons' "Shave and a Haircut, Two Bites," the main characters discover, and become drawn into, the symbiotic relationship between barbers and vampires, which involves in part the drinking of vampire blood to gain immortality. The conventions of the old-time western are turned topsy-turvy, both for the reader and for the main character, in Chet Williamson's "Yore Skin's Jes's Soft 'n' Purty . . . He Said." (Page 243.) And invisible childhood friends grow up and cause sexual complications at the very least in Tatyana Tolstaya's "Date with a Bird" and in Jonathan Carroll's "Mr. Fiddlehead"; this latter tale features a particularly nasty sting at the end, absolutely chilling and absolutely right.

The fourth quality is an intriguing premise well handled. In Joseph A. Citro's "Them Bald-Headed Snays," human pain can be alleviated by slaughtering one of a race of fear-resistant human-like creatures. In Fred Chappell's "The Adder," a dormant opot of the *Necronomicon* regains its strength by perverting the works of Milton. In Joyce Carol Oates' "Family," parents, in what may be a post-holocaust setting, keep

drifting away and being replaced by new ones. Borrowing from or perhaps merely synchronous with Roger Rabkin's, James Powell's "A Dirge for Clowntown" is a mystery set in a world populated entirely by clowns. Dan DiNoi's "Self-Portrait Mixed Media on Pavement, 1988" explores the vanality of the professional art world when a performance artist announces his intention to dive into a frame from several stories up. Bruce Sterling's "Don Bangs" extrapolates a meeting and mating between critic Lester Bangs and underground comic artist Don Seda. In Leszek Kolakowski's "The War with Things," poor Ditto's wife Lina doesn't believe him about the pancakes' acting up but has no problem believing *their side* of the story. In John Shirley's "Equilibrium," a veteran takes an odd revenge on the neglectful parents of a wounded war buddy. And in "White Noise," Garry Kilworth imagines what might happen if the sounds of the Red Sea parting and of God's voice had been trapped in the cold currents of the water and suddenly became accessible to modern cars.

The fifth quality is a particularly effective trick ending. Although the stories I mention here do not rely solely—as lesser tales might—on the element of surprise, if you don't like being tipped off, kindly leave the rest of us and resume reading at the next paragraph. Are they gone? Good, here's a platter of chocolate truffles I've been hiding behind my back all this time. Take your fair share, eat 'em quick, and no fair telling the others when they rejoin us. Two stories are particularly delightful because of their endings: One is "Dogfear," in which Garry Kilworth imagines a *facier* trapped in an old house and growing angrier, the approach of an innocent child and her grandpa, the hunger of the *facier* for the child, and the reverse entrapment that ensues. The other is Reginald Becton's "Unknown Things," in which a wealthy collector of devices that baffle, who destroys them one's he's prided out the heart of their mystery, does away with his exotic wife once he figures out what she's all about—much to the dismay of the narrator, who is enthralled by her.

The sixth quality, more apropos of dark fantasy than light, is a lingering, indeed growing, feeling of dread once the reading of the story is over. Not coincidentally perhaps, these stories both traffic in trick

## Read This

Recently read and recommended by James P. Blaylock:

I've been asked to supply a list of books that I'd recommend to "like-minded" readers, which is to say a fairly puzzling, maybe confused list. Clearly, I'm going to have to leave it to other contributors to be hip and contemporary. This is mainly a list of books that I've *recently* read—books, in other words, that I continually recommend to myself.

*Doom*, by William Gerhardie (or Gerhardt, depending). Early sf, an apocalyptic novel set in 1925 London. It's funny, compassionate, shameless, and painful. Gerhardie is one of the ignored giants of literature. Read *The Polyglots* and *Futility*, too. Lots of laughs and tears.

*Masters of Atlantis*, by Charles Pottis. The story of Lamar Jimmerson of the Gnomon Society. Here are bits of jacket copy: "They're independent thinkers. The kind of men who order lots of exotic merchandise through the mail . . . unusual headgear, sacred texts, triangles . . . a fateful gathering of Gnomons in a mobile-home park on an East Texas ranch . . ."

*The Best of Mytes*, by Myles na Gopaleen (who was actually Flann O'Brien, who was actually Brian O'Nolan). Hilarious and indescribable collection of columns originally written for *The Irish Times*. S. J. Perelman called Flann O'Brien "the best comic writer I can think of." Funniest book ever written.

*Home Is the Sailor*, by Jorge Amado. This ought to appeal to readers who like novels with a fantastic edge and who are puzzled in the face of so-called reality. "Where is the

truth . . . in the tiny reality of each of us, or in the immense human dream?"

*The Lost Steps*, by Alejo Carpentier. A beautiful and strange book about an exotic jungle quest to find curious, stone-age musical instruments. "A day will come when men will discover an alphabet in the eyes of chalcodones, in the markings of the moth, and will learn in astonishment that every spotted snail has always been a poem."

*Lad-in-the-Mist*, by Hope Mirrales. Actually, I haven't reread this book in several years. But so what? For all you know I read it yesterday. It's simply one of the best fantasy novels ever written. Beautiful, eerie, full of human truth. Check your used bookstore for tattered copies of the Ballantine Adult Fantasy reissue.

*Three Upmanship*, by Stephen Potter. Contains *One-upmanship*, *Life-upmanship*, and *Game-upmanship*. Useful chapters on making people feel awkward, on winning games without actually cheating, on sounding profound by saying things that "pass the test of the boldly meaningless." Funniest book ever written.

*At the Mercy of the Elephants*, by Walt Kelly. Volume 2 of *The Complete Pogo Comics*. (Volume 1 easily available; 20 more to come.) According to reliable sources, there's clear theological evidence that reading Pogo actually *reduces* the number of years a person is indentured to Purgatory. Funniest . . .

endings and unreliable narrators. In Ramsey Campbell's "Meeting the Author," a young boy, traumatized by an encounter with a children's author who dislikes children, is subsequently tormented by a pop-up figure of the same smiling man. And in Nancy Etchemendy's "Cat in Glass," three generations of women become the victims, according to our narrator, of a demonic object d'art.

Now to the stories I have deemed "failures" earlier in this essay. To paraphrase Tolstoy, successful stories succeed in similar ways, while misstepping stories stumble uniquely. Particularly with tales which have made it into this collection, it is not as simple as saying story X is badly penned, or lacks interesting characters, or promises a novel twist but never delivers. The failures are more elusive than that and may well be idiosyncratic (he humbly acknowledges) to the reviewer himself; not all narrators, even worthy ones, find their ideal reader in every pair of eyes. That said, on to the task at hand.

In Gary A. Braunbeck's "Matters of Family," we watch Albert come to pieces over his losses, hallucinating dead parents and dissociating from his own body as he lets a cigarette conflagrate his troubles and his life away. The effect, while mildly horrific, is mostly just depressing; Albert is less an object of pity than of pathos and not a character one feels much sympathy for.

Andrew Stephenson's "Cinema Altere" is a time travel tale with a marvelous premise but, try as I might, I could not follow its logic. Stephenson posits a film crew whose specialty is disaster movies which depict real atrocities. They go back in time, with a van full of napalm, to a town square, eight cameras trained on the scene. Through some process of doubling back through time, they manage to get the footage without having to perpetrate the deed itself, but despite the author's dubious explanation near the end, I regret to say I'm baffled as to how they did it. I can imagine workable explanations, but they don't seem to operate here, and that's a shame because I really wanted to like this story.

Some stories are slight. In Joan Aiken's "Find Me," for example, a prince travels to a deserted house to stare into a mirror which shows where lost items are. A young woman comes for the same purpose, they find each other, and presumably begin a happily-ever-after. The mirror is a potent symbol which fails to yield its full potential, perhaps in part because the characters are so generic. I had a similar response to Jane Yolen's "The Faery Flag," about a faery mother who saves her human infant by coming back from the land of Faerie. The mother and child are mere sketches, and the only sacrifice she makes as far as I can tell is the loss of a dog she doesn't seem to care much about. The shawl she waves (the flag of the title) seems to bear less symbolic weight than the author would like. The same sort of problem occurs in Robley Wilson's "Terrible Kisses," in which a wife's all-over lipstick kisses refuse to

come off her husband's body; one senses some sort of love (or entrapment) allegory struggling to free itself, without success, from the confines of what is essentially an interesting gimmick.

Also slight, but in a way different from these latter three stories, is Leif Enger's "Hansel's Finger." Howard Arvis finds a severed finger in Disney World, pockets it, and wanders through the attractions, musing on past events obliquely related to images of dismemberment and wondering what to do with his discovery. There are finger and hand puns aplenty, all part of a detachment that contributes to the cool tone Ellen Datlow notes, and the writing is very good. But on the whole, this story struck me as (forgive me) little more than a five-finger exercise.

For all my pretense at erudition, I'm a lazy reader: I like to be entertained and I dislike working too hard at it. The last two "failures" I'll mention, then, are tales which reach out ambitiously but lose this reader by going after too many strands of story. Tanith Lee's "White as Sin, Now" plays in a quasi-Spenserian vein with fairy tale tropes, but proved far too disjointed for my tastes. I lost patience after several lacks and hews at its thicket of beambles; not a story for us Prince Un-Charmings, then, but one that may well reward more persistent readers. In Michael Moorcock's "Hanging the Fool," the tarot deck somehow orders the telling, at several removes, of a tale of maps on skin, flayed men, and exotic romance; I had a hard time keeping the characters straight, and Moorcock's Jamesian distancing devices made this a bewildering story indeed.

Now for the accolades. As good as the successful stories I have named are, and many of them are very good indeed, there are six stories which stand above the rest. They are, without exception, very strong in the first and second qualities—assured writing and characters we find interesting. Four dabble in trick endings, two twist old themes or stories, and four exhibit what one is tempted to call the septentrion of good storytelling—an abundance of invention and marvel.

Lisa Tuttle's "The Walled Garden" is a strong, poignant, and outright magical tale of a young girl who chances upon a walled garden inside which an adult couple gaze at her and join hands. As she grows up, she comes gradually to discover the significance of her childhood vision. In many ways, growing up is precisely what this fine story is about.

Rory Harper's "Monsters, Tearing Off My Face" seems at first to be about child abuse. It's told from the perspective of an adopted four-year-old girl, and it features a staggeringly wonderful trick ending which I won't reveal just so you can delight in it on your first reading. A hint: Imagine describing the most horrific of acts while retaining a young child's sense of innocence and wonder, and you'll have some idea of the writer's achievement here.

Delia Sherman's "Miss Carstairs and the Merman" (its title no

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doubt a conscious echo of the William Powell film "Mr. Peabody and the mermaid") is a brilliant, lovely, and lovingly detailed narrative of the interaction between a merman and the scientist obsessed with the breakthrough her discovery of him represents. In transcending that role, she discovers as well the widening dimensions of her own humanity.

Scott Baker's "Varicose Worms" is a delightful shaman story set in Paris, complete with nine tapeworms, bestial transforms, the homeless as secret shamans, and potential human spirits guarded, against eventual reincarnation, by invisible eagles in aeris atop the Eiffel Tower. The point-of-view character, a manipulative son-of-a-bitch of a shaman, must vanquish an unknown enemy before losing his power. Their battleground: the body of his wife.

Michael de Larrabeiti's "The Plane Tree and the Fountain" is a wonderful and wise retelling of a Provençal folk tale about a baron who meets a troubadour and decided to give up the trials of government. If all of the tales de Larrabeiti garnered from the shepherds of Provençal are this full of wonder and enchantment, then *Provençal Tales* (St.

Martin's Press, 1988), the collection from which this story is taken, is well worth tracking down.

Greg Bear's "Sleepside Story" is a winning inversion of the Beauty and the Beast tale, set in what appears to be an alternate view of Manhattan. Terri Windling calls it "the best fantasy novella of the year" and I suspect she's right. In a story which borrows elements from the Orpheus and Theseus legends as well, one Oliver Jones must travel the Night Metro from Sleepside to Sunside in order to rescue his mother from an aging madam. The parallels with the French fairy tale are precisely drawn, and yet this urban fantasy has its own richness and integrity as well. A story not to miss.

In short, this is a collection carefully contrived, with lots of worthy fiction to delight, challenge, and at times dismay you. *The Year's Best*, with all its wonders, belongs in your collection, if only to remind you what a fine year it was in the realms of fantasy and horror. ▶

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## Luke McGuff Small Press Reviews

Caveats: The music industry in the late '70s and '80s was too bloated, concentrating on surefire platinum records and line-filling fodder. The midlist, the place to put a promising group needing a chance to develop (despite moderate or even disappointing sales) disappeared. The same thing is happening in sf today (all genre publishing, for that matter): Bloated publishing lines are producing one or two surefire hits and lots of bottom of the list fodder.

What happened in music was the rise of indie labels, fueled by working bands and their friends who *knew* this music was worth getting to its audience, wherever that audience might be. Sometimes these indie labels discovered there was a much larger audience for their music than they had dreamed possible. Now labels like SST, Twin Tone and SubPop are the midlist of the music industry.

The science fiction small press is beginning to function as the field's midlist. Where writers like Carol Emshwiller, R. A. Lafferty, Don Webb and T. Winter-Damon can have a place to appear in print. The old saw about semipro fiction magazines publishing only second-rate work has been outmoded since the days of *Starlog* and *Unearthed*. Some zines, like *Journal Wired* and *Aboriginal*, successfully cross and blur the line between small and large press.

### Nova Express, Summer 1990

\$3.00 each

White Car Publications, P.O. Box 27231, Austin, TX  
78755-2231

*Nova Express* has been around for a couple years, but this is the first copy I've seen. Lack of context might cause me to miss something important, but at least I'll be erring in favor of praise.

The production is fairly straightforward, 11 x 17, folded in half for an 8-1/2 x 11 page size. Nothing nearly as fancy as Watson's production of *Journal Wired*, but still readable. The story by Joe R. Lansdale is amusing: I'm always a sucker for a little with equations in it, and "The Diaper or The Adventures of the Little Rounder" uses them appropriately.

The reviews cover a range of large and small press works, some of which would be called "cutting edge," if there was enough focus left for sci-fi to have an edge. Although a bit stylistically top-heavy for my taste, T. Winter-Damon's review of *Book of the Dead* covered the bases for people likely to read the book. There's also a good interview of Pat Murphy (at the '88 and '89 ArmadilloCons).

My only complaint is with the naïveté of the editorial. The assistant editor, Dwight Brown, makes some valid points about the growing editorial/production sloppiness of the major publishing houses. But then he acts as if he honestly believes a multinational corporation would

respond to a few angry letters from boycotters affecting less than one-millionth of one percent of its annual gross. I don't think that would happen. My response is do it yourself, Dwight, just like you do a magazine. If the root motivation for doing a zine like *Nova Express* is to do the zine you want to see, why not do the books you want to see? I bet you and your computers both could handle it.

### ANPA West, Vol. 1, #s 1, 2 & 3

\$25.00/yr. membership

Tom Etter, 25 Buena Vista, Mill Valley, CA 94941

"ANPA" stands for "Alternative Natural Philosophy Association," an international group of scientists trying to develop new paradigms of modeling in quantum and "post-classical physics." In this case, I have all three issues produced as of November '90. But the context I lack is the language being used. Frankly, I can barely understand three words in a row. I mean, I haven't seen such dense language since "A Stress Analysis of a Strapless Evening Gown" in *Journal of Irreproducible Results*. I don't know if this is daring exploration that, in a few years, will seem perfectly acceptable, or if this is babble and always will be. Maybe even the people involved don't know this yet.

These guys aren't subliminal-channeling crystal-rubbers. They work at Stanford Linear Accelerator Labs and similar research centers. Pierre Noyes, one of the founders, worked at Lawrence Livermore in the '60s, but cancelled his security clearances in protest against the Vietnam War. He gets lots of points from me for that.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of *ANPA West*, from my own viewpoint, is that it's the only physics fanzine I've heard of. I've seen fanzines of science fiction, art, music, writing, video horror, wrestling—even mathematics and planetary—but never one about physics. I hope Etter and his cohorts don't feel demeaned that this is what I've managed to pull out of their efforts.

If you have an interest in the furthest edge of speculative physics, or if you're looking for a group that's trying to combine subjective/nonlogical states of being and quantum mechanics without sinking into new age mystical hoo-hah, then this is the place you could start.

Are these the people Connie Willis wrote about in "At the Rialto"?

Remember: If you know of a science-fiction small press magazine (as you can, see definitions are loose when I'm in town), please send it to me, or let me know about it. My address: Luke McGuff, 4121 Interlake Ave. No., Seattle, WA 98103. All other materials for review should go directly to NTRSP at their editorial address. ▶

Luke McGuff lives in Seattle, Washington—as you have just read.

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Excerpts from *The Transylvanian Library:*  
A Consumer's Guide to Vampire Fiction

FLANDERS, JOHN (Pseudonym of JEAN RAY)  
"The Graveyard Duchess" (*Weird Tales*, December 1934: 11 pp.)

Why go hunting for victims when you can hire them to come to you? This, apparently, is the philosophy of the late Duchess Opoltschenska, a *maefrats* of unusual foresight—and laziness.

Sometimes published as "The Guardian of the Cemetery," this story tells of a hungry man who accepts a job as groundskeeper at the private cemetery of the Duchess, only to discover the hidden graves of his eight predecessors. Obviously, the job has unexpected hazards, but nothing, it turns out, that a loaded revolver can't solve. Still, even if the Duchess herself came to a bad end after less than a dozen victims, there's nothing inherently wrong with her idea of arranging for steady meals before your transformation, especially if, unlike the Duchess, you happen to be a bullet-proof Undead.

An interesting, if fairly predictable, variation on the Standard Early Vampire Story.



CARR, JOHN DICKSON

*The Three Coffins* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935: 306 pp.)  
*His Who Whispers* (New York: Harper and Row, 1946: 250 pp.)

"I would credit, mind you, a vampire who materialised in the daytime. I could even credit a vampire who killed with a swordstick. But I could not credit, not at any time, a vampire who pinched somebody's briefcase containing money."

"That jarred my sense of the fitness of things."

—Dr. Gideon Fell, infallible amateur detective.

I confess it. I have an unfair prejudice against stories, no matter how well-executed, in which the vampire(s) turn(s) out to be hoax(es). This is a venerable tradition, granted, dating all the way back to the fraudulent Sussex Vampire (see DOYLE), and including such well-known stories as "No Such Thing as a Vampire" and "The Living Dead." Hollywood too has provided plenty of bogus Undead in movies like *London After Midnight* (1927), *The Vampire Bat* (1933), *Mark of the Vampire* (1935), *Isle of the Dead* (1945), and even, yes, *The Maltese Bippy* (1969).

And every single time I felt cheated.

Take *His Who Whispers*, from which the above quote was taken: this is a fine old whodunit, full of unexpected twists and vivid characters. Yet all the time I was reading it, part of me kept hoping that mundane ratiocination would not finally exorcise the eerie atmosphere that the author works so hard to evoke. Other vampire-fans may feel the same way.

Another warning, then: Carr will ply you with innuendo, tease you with unearthly foreplay until, willingly, you suspend your disbelief, and then . . .

Sigh, cheated again!

(If you're a glutton for punishment, see: BLOCH, MATTHESON, McDANIEL, MCKEAN, PLATT.)



HORLER, SIDNEY

"The Believer: Ten Minutes of Horror" (7 pp.)  
*The Vampire* (London: Hutchinson, 1935: 288 pp.)

In an "Open Letter" at the beginning of his novel, Horler expresses the fear that the book would invariably be compared, perhaps unfavorably, to *Dracula*. He then explains how a good friend encouraged him to tell his story anyway.

God save us from such friends! *The Vampire* does indeed bear a striking resemblance to Stoker, with its Undead "Sovannian" nobleman  
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preying on the young women of London until a venerable professor, Dr. Metternich of Vienna, leads a band of heroes against the vampire, except that Horler is an embarrassingly silly writer.

Listen to the evil Baron Ziska, if you will, while he threatens the hapless heroine:

"You thought you would escape me, my darling, but, you see, I am stronger than you. Did I not once tell you that you belonged to me and that I would never let you go? Very well, then—why were you so foolish? As for that upstart Kent, who has taken so much upon himself that he imagines he can defy me—me, Ziska!—well, his time will soon come."

Can't you just imagine him twirling his mustache like the villain of a bad melodrama? One can't help noticing that all the bad guys in this are either freaks, foreigners, or lesbians. And, on an even sillier note, Ziska's powers include his own telepathic sound effect: the Astral Bell. GONG!

Like I've said before, the first half of the Twentieth Century was not exactly the golden age of vampire novels.

"The Believer" is slightly better: a short, sad story of a burly English villager who is possessed by a blood-lusting demon. Eventually, this Reluctant Vampire shoots himself—only to free the demon to find another host . . . "God help its luckless victim."

Even still, it's hard to accept nowadays that Horler was once the best-selling author of over fifty novels. Some vampires, I guess, are less immortal than others, as are some authors.



HYDER, ALAN

*Vampires Overhead* (London: Philip Allan, 1935: 248 pp.)

Following a close encounter with a mysterious comet, Earth is overrun by swarms of dog-sized vampire bats. Civilization as we know it is largely destroyed, but a handful of survivors struggle against extinction (and each other) until the Vampires inexplicably disappear.

Set and published in Great Britain, where such stories have always been popular, *Vampires Overhead* is not so much a horror novel as it is a science fiction "catastrophe" story in the tradition of *The War of the Worlds*. There's not much here for the true vampire fan—and no true vampires.



DREADSTONE, CARL

*Dracula's Daughter* (New York: Berkley Medallion, 1977: 212 pp.)

No, this dutiful Librarian is not getting ahead of himself, chronologically speaking. Although published forty-one years later, this book is actually a faithful novelization of a 1936 Universal Picture of the same name, thus making it (in essence, at least) a vintage piece of 1930s vampire fiction.

The screenplay itself, written by Garrett Fort with possible contributions by John Balderston, picks up from where *Dracula* (1931) left off, with the Countess Marya Zaleska arriving immediately in the wake of Dracula's staking and eventually setting up shop in a dingy London studio. Unlike her infamous father, however, the Countess is definitely a Reluctant Vampiress, who turns to a handsome psychiatrist in hopes of release. ("Do you believe that the dead have power over the living?" she asks.)

Coincidentally, her young shrink is also busily engaged in trying to defend his mentor, one Abraham Van Helsing, against a charge of murder. Seems the old man was caught driving a stake through a visiting nobleman . . .

Van Helsing is the only character from the original book, movie, and play

Paul Williams  
from *Rock and Roll: The 100 Best Singles*

The Everly Brothers  
"All I Have to Do Is Dream"

It goes by so fast. But it won't go away. This song has been running through my head for years and years, and I don't even know why, just kind of got stuck in here somehow. It's so pretty, so evanescent, so—dreamlike. Richard Meltzer used to use the term "heaven rock" to describe certain songs, certain performances; to me it means a "lighter than air" sound, not lightweight but just the opposite—immensely powerful, monstrously forceful and affecting, precisely because of its unearthly, mysterious lightness. And therefore "rock," in the very subjective sense of "songs created in a rock context, in the rock era, that do in fact rock us to our foundations and thus help make life satisfying, exciting, worth living." Got that? Anyway, when my more linear mind asks me how I can listen to "All I Have to Do Is Dream" and call it rock and roll, I get momentarily defensive (yes I do, even though I know I'm right, but even though I know I don't have to justify anything), but then I notice that in the good year 1958 this record was number one not only on the pop and country charts, but on the r&b charts as well. On the r&b charts? Which just comes back to the same thing: some sounds are so white that they're not white at all, they zoom far beyond the bonds of this culture and its categories and preconceptions. Knock me over with a feather. With the suggestion of a feather. And the listener needs no justification or explanation. All he knows is, he loves the sound. It caresses his spirit. Sticks in his mind.

The message of the song is one eternally repeated by songwriters, and eternally appealing. It looks back to Leadbelly's "Goodnight Irene" ("I'll get you in my dreams") and ahead to the Temptations' "Just My Imagination" and to Jonathan Richman in 1971 anticipating both punk and the new age with the Modern Lovers' wonderful "Astral Plane":

"Tonight I'm all alone in my room

I'll go insane  
If you won't sleep with me I'll still be with you  
I'm gonna meet you on the astral plane."  
(Unless of course Leadbelly gets to you first.)

But back to the Everlys. They don't sound like two guys. But they don't sound like one guy either. They sound (let's face it) like an angel. That vocal texture combined with this subject matter (dreaminess, impotence, desire as a possession, longing, precious pleasurable sweet madness) is so remarkable, so mysterious, so immediately familiar, so penetrating . . . there is no way to communicate on paper (to someone who hasn't heard the performance) the semantic content of the words "I need you so that I could die" as sung here by these voices. And yet the meaning is unmistakable, inarguable, in the listening. The climax of the song for me is their reading of the five-word couplet—like a koan, a riddle at once obvious and infinitely challenging—"Only trouble is/Gee whiz." I'm not trying to be funny. I've thought of writing a book called *Only Trouble Is*. The phrase literally haunts me.

Notice that there is no instrumental break in this record; after the opening non-melodic guitar chord (fascinating gesture, like a door closing, the end at the beginning) it's vocals straight through to the fade. The bridge occurs twice. Every phrase leads into another, and always that wonderful trembling reading of "dream," stretched out like a little musical bridge itself, five syllables, two "high tenors with about a third of a note's difference between their voices" (I read that somewhere) "dree-cc-ee-cc-ee-cc-ee," God I love it, it's just like some kind of a close friend, I don't even have to listen to the record with this one, it's just with me.

And then it's gone again. Who was that guy? How does he do that with his voice!

First release: Cadence 1348, March 1958

to reappear in this sequel, shielding the others from prosecution on the grounds that "they have suffered enough." Still, *Dracula's Daughter* has the same science-versus-supernatural feel as its predecessor, with the Professor and his new disciple uniting to chase Marya back to Castle Dracula—where she meets with a crossbow bolt fired by a jealous servant. Says Van Helsing: "She was beautiful when she died—a hundred years ago."

The movie was a solemn, low-key affair, distinguished by two unforgettable scenes: the fiery cremation/exorcism of the late Count, and the daughter's subtle seduction of a young would-be model. (More echoes of *Carmina*, even in an old American film!) The novel version, though decades younger, is equally heavy on atmospherics and mood, differing only in that it identifies Countess Zaleska as the child of a pregnant woman attacked by Dracula, thus making her neither human nor truly Undead.

Rumor has it that "Carl Dreadstone" is actually the British horror writer Ramsey Campbell—who in fact provides an introduction to this book!

See also: CAMPBELL.



WELLMAN, MANLEY WADE  
"The Horror Undying" (*Weird Tales*, May 1936: 10 pp.)

"School for the Unspeakable" (*Weird Tales*, September 1937: 10 pp.)  
"When It Was Moonlight" (*Unknown Worlds*, February 1940: 16 pp.)  
"The Vampire of Shaloh" (*Weird Tales*, July 1942: 5 pp.)  
"The Devil Is Not Mocked" (*Unknown Worlds*, June 1943: 6 pp.)  
"The Last Grave of Lil Warran" (*Weird Tales*, May 1951: 24 pp.)

Wellman, a prolific fantasy writer whose career lasted well into the 1980s, treated vampires the way a skilled craftsman treats one of his favorite tools. Without adding or detracting anything to the basic idea, he put it to work in a variety of situations. At his best, Wellman's stories are slick and entertaining. Other times, they are simply slick.

"The Horror Undying" falls somewhere in the middle. A wanderer, stumbling into an apparently abandoned cabin, leafs through a scrapbook of clippings and pamphlets. With growing unease, he reads of a series of cannibalistic murders, decides apart, which were all committed by the same man, a man who has been executed several times already! With surprising speed, he realizes the truth: that dead werewolves, left uncremated, rise as vampires. Just then, the owner of the scrapbook comes home . . .



"School for the Unspeakable" features a trio of teen-age Creatures of Hell who assail the 15-year-old hero on his way to boarding school.

As with the werewolf/vampire in the previous story, the monsters in this story are not merely Undead; they are also practicing Satanists. (Wellman, apparently, liked to use several tools at once.)

This starts out well, striking a receptive nerve in anyone who's ever worried about what his new classmates would be like, but the ending, in which the menacing students are driven off by the ghost of their Bible-spouting headmaster, is not entirely satisfactory.



Now here's an appealing notion: What if Edgar Allan Poe met a vampire? In "When It Was Moonlight," set in Philadelphia in 1842, Poe the journalist goes to investigate a reported case of premature burial. What he finds instead is Elva Gauber, a vampire housewife who hates garlic, loves blood, and, even more so than Varney or Lord Ruthven, depends on moonlight for animation. (We might note that this particular superstition has been rather neglected since *Dracula*.) In true Poe-etic fashion, evil Elva eventually finds herself walked up in the basement away from the moon—as in "The Black Cat" and "The Cask of Amontillado."



"The Devil Is Not Mocked," my personal favorite of Wellman's stories, may be the first direct sequel to *Dracula* ever published (the written word filling several years behind the movies in this respect). Fifty years after Jonathan Harker supposedly put the Count to rest, a Nazi battalion makes the mistake of occupying an old castle in the Carpathian Mountains. They expect no resistance.

Hee hee hee!

Like the Poe story, which was also published in *Unknown Worlds* magazine, "The Devil" is a playful piece that provides only a clever mixing of horrors, a chuckle of evil anticipation, a dose of nostalgia, and the pleasure of seeing an old friend back in action. When it's done right, though, this can be irresistible.

A TV-adaptation starred Francis Lederer as *Dracula*.



Supposedly based on a true story, "The Vampire of Shiloh" formed the opening chapter of a longer story, "Coven," which may or may not have belonged in this Library. On its own, the story extends into the American Civil War: a traditional Eastern European means of vampire detection: look for the grave over which a young male virgin, riding a horse similarly inexperienced, cannot cross. Whether for lack of horses or virgins, this foolproof technique is seldom utilized by fictional vampire-hunters (a notable exception: the 1979 Universal production of *Dracula*, which got by with just the horse), but in this case a beleaguered troop of Union soldiers are saved from a mysterious female bloodsucker by a fourteen-year-old Confederate prisoner of war's embarrassing lack of a sweetheart.

A triumph, of sorts, for Southern gentility.



John Thunstone, a colleague of occult investigator Jules de Grandin (see QUINN), was a recurring presence in Wellman's books and stories. In "The Last Grave of Lil Warren," Thunstone hears tell of a body that keeps stubbornly turning up outside its grave. Poking into the dead woman's past, he discovers that the infamous Lil was both a witch and a werewolf. Now, of course, she's Undead.

Fortunately, Thunstone has a silver sword.

Despite its distinctive hillbilly rural setting (of a sort Wellman would eventually specialize in), this is probably the most forgettable of his vampire stories.



KUTTNER, HENRY

"I, the Vampire" (*Weird Tales*, February 1937: 23 pp.)

*Weird Tales* deserves credit for, among other things, versatility.  
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The same magazine that ran Smith's and Howard's fantasies, set in the days of yore, also published this determinedly "modern" vampire saga.

It is Hollywood during the '30s and horror movies are in vogue (as they were in real life). The mysterious Chevalier Putaine has arrived from Europe to star in an upcoming vampire epic, *Red Thirst*. The casting is perfect, for the Chevalier is definitely a suave character of the Bela Lugosi variety. Alas, only after a starter or two has succumbed to his fatal allure is it discovered that the Putaine does not show up on film, except as a sort of glowing mist.

Besides the vampire-playing-a-vampire twist, Kuttner makes his vampire shrewd enough to hide by day within an impenetrable steel vault. Thus, as in *Dracula*, exposure does not necessarily guarantee destruction. An attack of guilt, however, ultimately defeats such precautions, as the Reluctant Vampire voluntarily surrenders the key to his vault.

"I, the Vampire" has some nice moments, but nothing too exciting. It should not be confused with *I, Vampire*, which is something completely different. See SCOTT, JODY.

Kuttner also wrote at least one other vampire story, "Masquerade" (1942), which had something to do with a haunted house.



NICOLSON, JOHN W.

*Fingers of Fear* (New York: Cowice-Friede, 1937: 309 pp.)

This book probably seemed silly the day it was published, and the passing decades have not done anything to help, except perhaps to provide a few more unintentional giggles. This may not be a bad thing; one wishes that Varney were still so amusing.

At the height of the Depression, a desperate man accepts a job at Ormesby, the ancestral estate of the sinister Ormes family, where he is quickly deluged by every sort of Gothic complication imaginable: secret passages, cryptic notes, murder, incest, a missing treasure, hidden relatives, ancient secrets, and modern crimes. And some talk of vampires too, of course.

The sheer excess of this kitchen-sink approach to horror is what makes the book so ludicrous. Shocking revelations come with amazing frequency, until it seems that there is a skeleton in every closet in Ormesby—and a long-lost sister to keep the skeleton company.

Where do the vampires fit in? A good question. Along the way, we hear of red marks on innocent throats, batwings brushing against people in the dark, and references to wooden stakes and "The Undead Thing." We also hear a lot about lycanthropy, mostly from the hero, who uses the terms "vampire" and "werewolf" as though they were interchangeable. (Six years after Bela Lugosi's *Dracula*, this is inexcusable.) Whatever, some sort of contagious bloodlust eventually spreads throughout the household. Torn throats become commonplace.

The apologetic narrator never really figures out what is going on, but he finally attempts to place all the horrors (past and present) at the feet of the long-dead family patriarch, who is either a ghost or a werewolf or a vampire. Or maybe the ghost of a vampire werewolf...?



### The NTRSF Readings at Dixon Place

There's still one reading left!

December 19

Michael Swanwick

James Morrow

Admission: \$4.98. Seating is limited.

Time: 8:00 p.m. (doors open at 7:30)

Dixon Place • 37 E. 1st St. (between 1st and 2nd Avenues) New York, NY 10003

## Screeed (letters of comment)

Damon Knight, Eugene, Oregon

Samuel R. Delany remarks on page 6 of #24 that the phrase "sense of wonder" "was most likely lifted in the forties by left-sympathizing sf critic Damon Knight from the twenty-fifth stanza of poet W. H. Auden's elegy, 'In Memory of Sigmund Freud' (1939)."

The phrase in question appears on pages 12-13 of my *In Search of Wonder*: "Science fiction exists to provide what Moskowitz and others call 'the sense of wonder' (...)" I knew Sam Moskowitz had used the phrase often enough to be tiresome; I put in "and others" because I was pretty sure he hadn't invented it. I have never read (or even heard of, until this very minute) "In Memory of Sigmund Freud." All this is a fantasy of Delany's, designed to let Jim Blish and me into a Procrustean schema of criticism; the gratuitous "left-sympathizing" can have no other purpose.

Another part of this fantasy, casually mentioned by both Delany and Kim Stanley Robinson, is that "SF originated in the pulp magazines." Hey, guys, have you ever heard of H. G. Wells, Robert Louis Stevenson, Mark Twain, or Edgar Allan Poe?

David Bratman, Crockett, California

Alexei Panshin's article on Hubbard lives up to the brief description Don Keller gave me a while ago. It's a thoroughly researched and cogently argued work. (And it has enough exclamation marks to confirm that it's an authentic Panshin product.)

Budrys could still argue—and probably will—that Hubbard's present low reputation is a result of Hubbard having been written out of the sf community after the Dianetics boondoggle, and there really isn't enough evidence to prove that his reputation was higher before 1950, but Panshin has well marshalled what arguments he can against it: the pre-1950 evidence that does exist, the evidence of continuing respect for Hubbard's talents to the extent that he deserves it, acknowledgment of how an impression of his preeminence could have been formed, and lastly an appeal to the evidence of the fiction itself.

Kenneth L. Houghton, New York, New York

A generally glorious issue (#25). Alexei Panshin does a thorough exegesis on the difference between a writer and writing literature; John Shirley gives the "Clarion Credo" debate some badly-needed perspective; Charles Platt reviews a non-genre ("mainstream") novel that (sorry) I did love; Tony Daniel contributes an article that I understand—disagree with, find trivial and/or incomplete, but at least can see something where it comes from and where it was trying to go; and Brian Aldiss and Don Keller convince me, respectively, to read Aldiss's recent fantasy collection and try reading *The Affirmation* one more time. All that for two bucks (plus an amortized cost of capital!)

And then there is Gordon Van Gelder's article. Well, he did call it "Provocations." While I don't disagree with his conclusion, there are a couple of questionable steps in his method. It's trivial, for instance, to note that *The New York Review of Horror* doesn't exist; I'll start if for him if he wants. Or Kathryn Cramer can. NYRSP's existence (for all of twenty-five issues) doesn't validate a genre any more than NYRPA's lack of existence invalidates one.

Similarly, I'm not certain sf stories have "characters smarter than their authors"—or that we should see that as much of an accomplishment if true. And what are we to say when Jeter and Bryant—not to mention Lansdale, Pelwick, King, Tuttle, Straub, Hand, Bloch, Shirley, and the Nancys (Springer and Collins)—write for both genres, in Straub's case both at once? I doubt Vladimir Horescu in John Shirley's *Dracula in Love*, for instance, would be any more intelligent in an sf novel; it seems more a question of which senses are most useful, and wherefrom comes the assault.

Maybe that's what the difference really is. Would you define Terry Bisson's "Carl's Lawn and Garden" as sf because of its ostensibly future setting, or is it really a post-Lovecraft horror tale? It seems more and more "sf" writers are losing their "Utopian" drives,

or have had them seriously impaired to the point of apologies and/or apologies. Of David Brin's introduction to *Earth*. It may well be true that sf deals with Man as the species could be, but it seems our "sf" writers are finding it increasingly difficult to be, er, transcendental. Horror at its best deals with the species as it is; one could hardly expect horror writers, who do not find such a bent endemic to their genre, to transcend from primal to transcendent if their sf brethren cannot.

I'm not sanguine about this "hip, nolr" rep for "movie-influenced sf." It is clear any cross-fertilization hasn't been two-way. The last nolr/sf film I remember is *Blade Runner* (which, thankfully, didn't have a novelization—because Phil Dick was alive then, and told the filmmakers to screw off and re-release *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* instead of letting someone hack his way through a story that already stood on its own). Somehow, *Millennium* and *Nightflyers* and *The Abyss* seem neither hip nor nolr.

Yes, horror fiction often lacks a sense of humor, could use some more irony, and has two paths as diverse as, say, "pulp" and New Wave. Timing is everything, as some Brt once wrote. Perhaps most important, horror's right to existence derives primarily from its "entertainment," not its "educational," value, to bifurcate a cohesive reality. It is true that people do not view most of the central characters in horror novels—especially the Schow, Skipp & Spector-type of "splatterpunk"—as role models. Nor should they. But with writers like Peter Straub subjecting horror fiction to analysis and changes, even as writers and editors have used such changes to revitalize sf (emphasis on literary values from F & SF and a social conscience from *Galaxy* in the late '40s/early '50s, increased literary experimentation from *The New Wave* and *New Worlds* in the mid-'60s, and a real use of the technology others had merely championed from the C-punks of the '80s, to name three or four), maybe there will be a *New York Review of Horror*, celebrating a 10th or 15th anniversary about the time NYRSP celebrates its 20th. And maybe something like the "splatterpunk" movement will be the next New Thing to revitalize sf.

As noted earlier, Mr. Van Gelder and I have the same goal: more quality horror and sf. Which brings me to one final, depressing observation. Gordon states he is "too broke" to be able to afford a search for answers himself. If a field that makes so much noise about how valuable its editors are cannot compensate them well enough to keep up in ostensibly related genres, that is a horror story.

## Splatterday

*Continued from page 24*

posed of smart, eloquent professionals, and I thought we might see some real dialogue this time, face to face. We might be able for a moment or two to drop the posturing and the prodding, roll up the shirtsleeves, and talk a bit about horror, splatterpunk, and what have you. But getting some of these people actually to *converse* was like trying to stamp a cockroach in the kitchen. Every time you thought they were cornered—when David Hartwell asked quite directly, "Are there any particular stylistic characteristics that can define 'splatterpunk'?", for instance—and tried to bring down the shoe, they wriggled away, scuttling faster than the eye could follow into hype and rhetoric. I learned that splatterpunk is horror with an affect—by which I could now conclude that Lovecraft and Poe (and perhaps even Shakespeare) were splatterpunks. There were a few interesting and elucidating comments—from Phil Nutman, Ed Bryant and Nancy Collins, especially—but there was still an awful lot of noise, as empty as dead air or static. And that is something the field, and the horror field most of all, could do without.

Maybe if we had less bluster and more open conversation, we would have fewer parties with cat food and more like Karl Edward Wagner's dead-dog party, where good feelings and good humor and friendly discussions are fostered—and the door is open. If we had more parties like that—if we were all so tolerant, receptive and open-minded—there would truly be no limits.

—Robert Kilheffer and the editors



## Splatterday

Splatterday started for me one hour early—at 11:00 p.m. on Friday, November 2, when I sat down to watch the Splatterpunk panel at the recent World Fantasy Con. By midnight, though tempted by the promise of an exclusive, one-time-only slide show by Phil Nixman (narrator) and *Tattoo*'s Steve Bisette, I was bone-weary of the rhetoric, and set off with others to seek solace in the evening's room parties. Little did I know, the panel was only the beginning—when it comes to splatterpunk, we are never free to walk away.

Paul Sammon's somewhat-belated anthology *Splatterpunk* was unveiled at this WFC amid much pomp and hype. Friday had had the panel, but Saturday—Saturday night, there was the party.

Room 3112 was unassuming from the outside—a door like any other. But within, it was Splatterdom, the smell of worn leather thick as incense (hell, maybe it *was* incense) and the glint of steel spikes never far from the corner of my eye. Liquor abounded—I must admit it was the best appointed of all the night's fêtes—and this was a balcony room with an open door: in one way at least this was the coolest party in the hotel.

The dip, I hear—I didn't have any, really I didn't—was cat food. One fellow attendee, upon later learning the truth, bolted from the room, not to be seen again that night. The bedroom offered some (obviously subversive) animated pornographic videos from Japan: I watched for a bit, and saw mostly scenes of a tentacled demon raping a virginal gymnast. Unimpressed, I left, leaving ecstatic cries of "Excellent!" in the darkened room behind me. Maybe it just wasn't my kind of porn.

(The next day, Ellen Datlow told me how she and a couple of others were kicked out at 1:30 or 2:00, so despite the splatterpunks' claims, perhaps there are limits.)

Sunday went off as I imagine any other WFC would. On the whole, it was a notably good convention, with such elder luminaries as L. Sprague de Camp, Fritz Leiber, and Jack Williamson and more recent lights from Karl Edward Wagner to Terri Windling to Emma Bull in evidence. The banquet was pleasant, the winners gracious, the food decent. A sad moment of silence was held in memory of Donald A. Wollheim. As we wound down toward the dead-dog parties, I found myself thinking back to Friday's panel, one of the only panels I had attended here.

The WFC is particularly attractive to me because of its high concentration of professionals, its few and focused panels, its thoughtful and knowledgeable membership—these are the sorts of things that make convention-going valuable to me. The vague area known as splatterpunk includes a lot of interesting, thought-provoking work. Many of you probably think you know what splatterpunk is, and I think I do too, but I couldn't hope to give you an encapsulated summary of it. I thought this convention would be a good chance to cut through the rhetoric and see what was happening there, to try to get a better sense from its practitioners and its advocates of what lies at the heart (among the other viscera) of this "movement."

The Splatterpunk panel let me down. It was com-

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